

Anna Kavoura

# “Successful and feminine athlete” and “natural-born fighter”

A discursive exploration of female judoka’s  
identities in Greece and Finland



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## ABSTRACT

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Despite feminist concerns about the asymmetrical distribution of power in martial arts and combat sports (MACS), sport psychology research has overlooked issues of inequality and socio-cultural difference, as well as their effects on athletes’ experiences and identity negotiation. The present doctoral dissertation explores the intersection of gender, culture, and identity in judo through the lens of cultural praxis and feminist poststructuralist frameworks. The aim was to explore in what ways the cultural context shapes the experiences and identities of female *judoka* (judo athletes). Two specific objectives were set: to trace the discourses (systems of knowledge) through which female judoka articulate and make sense of their experiences, and to develop a theoretically informed analytical understanding of how they construct their identities through the negotiation of sociocultural beliefs and gender stereotypes. An ethnographic approach was employed, and data were gathered during fieldwork in Greece and Finland. In conjunction with participant-observation, semi-structured interviews with 10 female judoka ages 17-40 were conducted in Greece, and nine semi-structured interviews with female judoka ages 20-49 were conducted in Finland.

A discursive analytic procedure revealed several discourses as relevant to the ways that female judoka make sense of themselves and their experiences, namely, a *female biological inferiority discourse*, *discourses of ideal femininity*, a *patriarchal discourse of gender roles*, a *discourse of gender equality*, and *discourses of athletic performance* and *elite and mass sport*. In this dissertation, I discuss the different and similar ways in which Greek and Finnish athletes are subjected to these discourses. In relation to the subject positions offered to them within these discourses, female judoka strategically construct multiple (and often conflicting) identities, each serving different purposes. I de-construct the *successful and feminine athlete* and the *natural-born fighter* to show how the repetition of certain identities assists in the reproduction of gender hierarchies and inequalities. I conclude that there is a need for discursive interventions to move toward gender equity in MACS.

Keywords: cultural praxis, cultural sport psychology, ethnography, feminist poststructuralist theory, gender, martial arts and combat sports, women

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Jyväskylä, Finland  
11.04.2018

Anna Kavoura

## LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

The thesis is based on the following original publications, which will be referred to by their Roman numerals.

- I Kavoura, A., Ryba, T. V., & Kokkonen, M. (2012). Psychological research on martial artists: A critical view from a cultural praxis framework. *Scandinavian Sport Studies Forum*, 3, 1-23.
- II Kavoura, A., Ryba, T. V., & Chroni, S. (2015). Negotiating female judoka identities in Greece: A Foucauldian discourse analysis. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 17, 88-98.
- III Kavoura, A., Kokkonen, M., Chroni, S., & Ryba T. V. (2017). "Some women are born fighters": Discursive constructions of a fighter's identity by female Finnish judo athletes. *Sex Roles*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0869-1>
- IV Kavoura, A. (2016). (Re)negotiating an athlete's identity during training and researching judo in Finland. In P. Berg & M. Kokkonen (Eds.), *Urheilun takapuoli: Tasa-arvo ja yhdenvertaisuus liikunnassa ja urheilussa [The backside of Sport: Equal Opportunities and Equality in Sports and Exercise]* (pp. 91-107). Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusverkosto/Nuorisotutkimusseura, julkaisuja 186.

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ABSTRACT

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

In this doctoral research, I have explored the identity negotiation of female *judoka* (judo athletes) in Greece and Finland through the lens of *sport psychology as cultural praxis* (Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon, & Fisher, 2015; Ryba & Wright, 2005, 2010) and feminist poststructuralist theorizing (Butler, 1990, 1993; Foucault, 1965, 1972, 1977, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Weedon, 1997). The dissertation consists of four separately published papers and the present summary article. The first publication (I) is a critical review of the literature problematizing the persisting connection between martial arts and combat sports (MACS)<sup>1</sup> and the male physical and psychological attributes reinforced by a large body of psychological studies. The second and third publications trace the discourses that are circulated in judo communities in Greece (II) and Finland (III) and discuss the ways in which female judoka negotiate their identities in relation to these discourses. The fourth publication (IV) is an autoethnographic account of my personal experiences and identity negotiation in judo.

In this summary article, I first position my doctoral research in the extant literature, and I present the theoretical frameworks, key concepts, and contexts. Second, I present the aims and research questions that unite all parts of the study. Third, I discuss my methodological choices and describe the empirical data that were used in the original publications. Fourth, I bring together the findings that have been presented in the original publications and expand the discussion. I conclude this dissertation by further elaborating on the significance of the findings and their implications for research, practice, and sport policy.

This research draws from and adds to the fields of cultural sport psychology, feminist sport studies, and gender studies in martial arts and combat sports. The research reported here serves to reveal and challenge the multiple ways in which gender inequalities in judo are reproduced.

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<sup>1</sup> There are no universally agreed-upon definitions of the terms “martial arts” and “combat sports,” and the distinction between the two typologies is not always an easy one to recognize. Following the suggestion of Channon and Jennings (2014), in this dissertation, I use martial arts and combat sports (MACS) as an umbrella term to refer to all these types of activities.

## 1.1 Starting point: Why study women's experiences in martial arts?

My initial motivation for conducting doctoral research on women's experiences in MACS began several years ago, originating from my personal experiences while training judo and Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ). It was during the second year of my master's studies in sport and exercise psychology when I was first exposed to gender theories. I was visiting *Ewha Womans University* in Seoul, South Korea, and I enrolled in a course offered by the Department of Psychology, titled *Women's Issues in Counseling*. During that course, I was encouraged to reflect on my personal experiences through the lens of gender and feminist theorizing. I started scrutinizing my choice to practice martial arts and my experiences in this male-dominated field. I also started flirting with the idea of delving deeper into this topic while pursuing a doctoral degree. When I returned to the University of Jyväskylä, and after completing my master's studies in 2009, Dr. Tatiana Ryba (who was a senior lecturer in the Master's Program in Sport and Exercise Psychology at that time) was the first to embrace the idea of conducting PhD research on women's experiences in MACS. Later, Drs. Marja Kokkonen and Stilian Chroni joined our feminist group.

There were several questions that had been burning inside me for years, and such PhD research could give me the chance to answer them, including "Why am I often the only woman in training?" and "Why are there so few women doing MACS compared to men?" By that time, I had visited several martial arts academies that taught my two favorite disciplines (judo and BJJ) in different parts of the globe, (e.g., Greece, Finland, and South Korea), and in the very best cases, I found three or four other women in training groups of more than 20 people. "What is it that keeps women away?" "Am I weird that I seem to find so much enjoyment in grappling?" "What kind of strategies could be employed to engage more women in MACS?" These burning questions became the starting point for my PhD.

First, I searched for answers in the sport psychology literature<sup>2</sup>. The extant scholarship (at that time) focused on the experiences of the male martial artist, who was viewed as the norm, while research on female martial artists was limited and focused on statistically comparing the female athlete with her male counterpart, or with "ordinary" (non-martial artists) women (see Publication I). Women were viewed as psychologically ill-suited to succeed in competitive MACS (e.g., Mroczkowska, 2009), while the ones who had (surprisingly) managed to build a career in MACS were viewed as different from ordinary women, and as having masculine psychological attributes (e.g., Gernigon & Le Bars, 2000). I felt troubled and alienated by this body of research, and by the underlying epistemology that treated women athletes and their experiences as the *Other*

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<sup>2</sup> The first original article on this PhD (Publication I) was the result of this critical examination of the extant psychological scholarship on MACS and was published in 2012.



(Baird, 2010; Krane, 1994; Spivak, 1988; Weedon, 2004). I could not accept that for some biological reason, I was ill-suited for MACS, neither could I accept being viewed as deviant in the literature, or “not a normal woman” in everyday language (even though it usually was intended to mean something positive when people in the gym described me that way).

Luckily, I was not alone in my reluctance to accept the traditional sport psychology explanations for women’s underrepresentation in MACS. Within the fields of cultural sport psychology, feminist sport studies, and gender studies in MACS, researchers had begun to challenge normative understandings of gender, which included problematizing the privileging of male experiences and identities in sports. In the section below, I explain how (and why) I positioned my study in the emerging field of cultural sport psychology, but I also built on previous feminist sport studies and gender studies in MACS. Moreover, I outline the theoretical frameworks and key concepts that I used to understand women’s experiences in judo, and I describe the contexts that were relevant in this study.

## 2 POSITIONING THE STUDY IN THE EXTANT LITERATURE

### 2.1 Cultural sport psychology studies

Cultural sport psychology (CSP) is a relatively new, but broad and rapidly growing field that emerged from critiques of the dominant scientific model of sport psychology (Blodgett et al., 2015; Ryba, 2017; Ryba & Schinke, 2009). Those critiques mainly focused on the forms of knowledge that have been utilized in mainstream sport psychology, as well as the politics of inclusion and exclusion that such forms contain (Fisher, Butryn, & Roper, 2005; Ryba & Schinke, 2009). Specifically, it has been argued that the knowledge base and applied practices of sport psychology have privileged white (Butryn, 2002, 2010), male (Gill, 1994; Krane, 1994), able-bodied (Semerjian, 2010), heterosexual identities (Krane, Waldron, Kauer, & Semerjian, 2010), while marginalizing other groups and their experiences. This lack of inclusion of culture and cultural identities, combined with an obsession with issues related to athletic performance and achievements, leads to a “blindness” in issues of ethics, representation, and equality (Fisher et al., 2005; Ryba & Wright, 2010).

The intersection of cultural studies with sport psychology has been suggested as a possible “cure” for this problem (Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009). Indeed, in their recent accounts of CSP’s development, Blodgett et al. (2015) and Ryba (2017) argue that the cultural-studies critique has advanced our understanding of psychological phenomena related to athletes’ behavior, well-being, and career development. For instance, while athletes’ identities have been studied predominantly as singular, fixed, and measurable entities (Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2015), there has been a gradual acknowledgement that they are actually multiple, fluid, and shaped by various cultural discourses (McGannon & Smith, 2015; Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2016). In addition, sport psychology scholars and consultants are now urged to reflect on their own identities, subjectivities, and biases and to develop cultural

competencies (McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Ryba, Stambulova, Si, & Schinke, 2013; Schinke, McGannon, Parham, & Lane, 2012).

Blodgett et al. (2015) further argue that CSP has evolved into a critical and multidisciplinary discourse, open to multiple theories, methodologies, content areas, and epistemological perspectives. Despite the diversity of the field, scholars who position their work in CSP have a common agenda: pushing toward a more culturally inclusive sport psychology field, understanding marginalized topics and cultural identities, and advancing social change and justice (Blodgett et al., 2015; Ryba, 2017). Examples of this kind of work in the content of MACS are the studies by Blodgett, Ge, Schinke, and McGannon (2017), and McGannon, Schinke, Ge, and Blodgett (2018) on the intersecting identities of elite female boxers. The authors revealed how certain racial, ethnic, religious, and gender identities result in individuals being disadvantaged, socially excluded and discriminated against in their careers. Along the same lines, the present study looks at female judoka identities to illuminate the ways in which gender inequalities are reproduced in judo. While this study is broadly positioned in CSP, it strategically draws on *sport psychology as cultural praxis* (Blodgett et al., 2015; Ryba & Wright, 2005, 2010), the tenets of which are described below.

### 2.1.1 Main tenets of *cultural praxis* framework

To guide culturally competent research and practice, Ryba and Wright (2005, 2010) introduced the *cultural praxis* framework. Cultural praxis calls for critical inquiries that (re) examine athletes' experiences and identities in relation to the specific dynamics of their cultural contexts (Blodgett et al., 2015; Ryba, 2017; Ryba & Wright, 2005, 2010). Putting this call into action requires blending theory, research, and practice (Ryba & Schinke, 2009). These three elements are the key tenets in the application of the cultural praxis framework.

*Theory.* Cultural praxis work should be informed by critical theorizing (Ryba & Wright, 2010). The term "critical" refers to theoretical perspectives that challenge the positivist tendency to describe (or create) a single universal knowledge base or truth by recognizing that knowledge production (i.e., what we consider as true) is linked to wider social and historical conditions and power dynamics (Pietikäinen, 2016). Specifically, CSP scholars (e.g., Butryn, 2002; Fisher et al., 2005; Ryba & Schinke, 2009) argue that mainstream theories of sport psychology contain Western biases, particularly biases favoring white males, who historically have dominated the field. Thus, over-reliance on mainstream theories and concepts might even lead to perpetuating stereotypes and unequal power relationships (Ryba & Schinke, 2009). Poststructuralist theory (discussed in detail below) has been delineated as one of several appropriate theoretical frameworks that could be applied in a cultural praxis project (McGannon & Busanich, 2010; McGannon & Smith, 2015; Ryba & Wright, 2010), as it argues for deconstructing normative assumptions and systems of knowledge (Butler, 1990, 1993; Foucault, 1972).

*Research.* Cultural praxis is an attempt to open up the current conservative field of sport psychology to qualitative research traditions and critical paradigms (Ryba & Wright, 2010). Hence, cultural praxis favors qualitative methodologies, such as discourse analysis, and critical forms of ethnography and auto-ethnography (McGannon & Smith, 2015; Ryba & Wright, 2010). Moreover, from a cultural praxis perspective, research is viewed as a political practice and as a means of understanding minority and marginalized voices. To challenge the ways in which minority groups have been represented as the cultural Other in Western academic discourse, cultural praxis advocates for indigenous and decolonized methodologies and epistemologies (see Ryba & Schinke, 2009).

*Practice.* At the core of cultural praxis is moving from academic knowledge production to social justice and change (Blodgett et al., 2015). This means that *praxis* projects seek to transform our socially unjust world, through translating theory into concrete actions and activities (Blodgett et al., 2015; Olive & Thorpe, 2018). For example, informed by a pedagogy of possibility (Ryba & Wright, 2010), cultural praxis seeks to educate athletes and those around them (e.g., coaches, parents, and team owners/managers/administrators). This educational approach focuses on inclusion, enjoyment, and equity, rather than enhancing athletic performance<sup>3</sup>. Inherent in this task is revealing the power relations and politics of inclusion/exclusion that operate in sport cultures (Masucci & Butryn, 2015; McGannon et al., 2018; Ryba et al., 2013). However, we should try to avoid imposing our own ethical standards and values on athletes (and non-athletes) whom we wish to educate (Ryba et al., 2013; Schinke et al., 2012). Instead, athletes should be approached as experts on their individual experiences, as research co-participants and agentic individuals who can negotiate power issues in their sporting contexts and harness the potential to contribute to change (Ryba & Wright, 2010).

In my research, I have strategically employed the cultural praxis framework to theorize on the experiences of female judoka in particular socio-cultural contexts (i.e., Greek and Finnish judo contexts). Other applications of the cultural praxis framework can be found in the content area of athletes' careers (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015; Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen, Bundgaard, & Selänne, 2015; Stambulova, Engström, Franck, Linnér, & Lindahl, 2015).

## 2.2 Feminist sport studies

Feminist scholars have problematized the privileging of male identities in sports for many years (see Hargreaves & Anderson, 2014, and Markula, 2005, for accounts of the development of feminist sport studies). Positioning their

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<sup>3</sup> From the cultural praxis perspective, the possibilities for performance enhancement are created through athletes' empowerment and through facilitating inclusive sporting environments (see Ryba & Wright, 2010).

work in subfields<sup>4</sup> such as sport history (Vertinsky, 1994), sport sociology (Hall, 1988; Markula, 1995), and sport psychology (Bredemeier, 2001; Gill, 1994; Krane, 1994) -- and sometimes even uniting these sub-disciplines through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work (Butryn, LaVoi, Kauer, Semerjian, & Waldron, 2014; Thorpe, 2014) -- sport feminists have criticized the use of gender (or sex) as a descriptive category of difference, e.g., challenging sport research that focuses on simply documenting gender differences in sporting performance. Instead, they have argued that social divisions such as gender (as well as class, race, sexual orientation, etc.) should be treated in terms of power relations (Hargreaves & Anderson, 2014).

While the first generation of sport feminists focused on better understanding the experiences of girls and women in sports and exercise, later feminist scholars expanded their work to do justice to multiple gender and sexual identities that are silenced and marginalized in sports (Caudwell, 2006; Krane et al., 2010). Fueled by radical advances in sport sociology, cultural studies, and gender studies, sport feminists started to engage in more critical and insightful analyses, acknowledging that sport cultures privilege not only males over females, but also heterosexuals over those with other sexual orientations, whites over people of color, etc. (Bredemeier, 2001; Hargreaves & Anderson, 2014; Krane et al., 2010).

Many feminist scholars see research as a tool for social change, and similarly to cultural studies scholars embrace a *praxis* approach to transform the power dynamics that privilege certain gendered identities over others (e.g., Bredemeier, 2001; Bredemeier et al., 1991; Bredemeier, Carlton, Hills, & Oglesby, 1999). Thus, CSP work draws on and aligns with feminist sport studies (Blodgett et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2005; Ryba & Wright, 2010). Several sport scholars have combined feminist and cultural critiques in their works, e.g., Baird's (2010) study on rugby and Thorpe's (2005, 2008, 2009) study on snowboarding, which shed light on the gender-power dynamics in these particular sport cultures that are typically seen as masculine. Krane et al. (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, and Kauer, 2004; Krane, Waldron, Michalenok, & Stiles-Shipley, 2001) explored how female athletes and exercisers negotiate cultural discourses of femininity. In addition, McGannon et al. (McGannon, Curtin, Schinke, & Schweinbenz, 2012; McGannon, McMahon, & Gonsalves, 2017; McGannon & Schinke, 2013) have done considerable work on how female athletes and exercisers negotiate motherhood ideals. The present study expands on these works.

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<sup>4</sup> While there are many different entry points into these subfields, most of the work to which I am referring in this dissertation is positioned under the umbrella of sport studies and kinesiology. As Hargreaves and Anderson (2014) explain, it was the first wave of female sport academics that started to address the marginalization of women in sports during the 1970s.

### 2.3 Gender studies in martial arts and combat sports

When I first started this doctoral research, there were only a few sociological studies on women's experiences in MACS (Guerandel & Mennesson, 2007; Halbert, 1997; Hargreaves, 1997; Macro, Viveiros, & Cipriano, 2009; Mennesson, 2000; Sisjord, 1997; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008, 2009; Young, 1997). These studies revealed complex social structures and gender inequalities that are clearly linked to women's underrepresentation in MACS. For example, Hargreaves (1997) argued that the development of women's boxing was "seriously constrained by dominant medical ideologies about the innate physical limitations of females and their unsuitability to take part in vigorous exercise" (p. 37). Halbert (1997) contended that for female athletes to succeed and remain marketable in the boxing industry, they had to strategically manage their identities and femininity. Guerandel and Mennesson (2007) argued that the gender hierarchies that exist in judo reflect the different gender norms, expectations, and roles assigned to men and women in the broader societal context.

A review that my colleagues and I conducted in 2012 revealed that psychological issues related to practicing or competing in MACS have mostly been studied among male participants (see Publication I). However, over the last couple of years, sport psychology studies on the experiences of women in MACS have started to appear (e.g., Blodgett et al., 2017; McGannon et al., 2018). A multidisciplinary research network centered around the study of MACS also emerged recently (see Bowman, 2017), and gender became one of the topics frequently discussed and studied in this network (e.g., an edited volume by Channon & Matthews, 2015). A few of these recent works indicate positive cultural changes in the ways of thinking and talking about gender and femininity in martial arts, the population of women training and competing, and the opportunities available for women (Channon & Phipps, 2017; Kavoura, Chroni, Kokkonen, & Ryba, 2015; Woodward, 2014). In these works, women's participation in MACS is seen as a tool for change, offering possibilities to disrupt myths about the frailty and inferiority of the female body (e.g., Channon, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). And yet, (auto)ethnographic accounts of female and male fighters (Masucci & Butryn, 2015; Matthews, 2016; McNaughton, 2012; Owton, 2015), as well as other recent empirical studies (Kavoura, Kokkonen, & Ryba, 2014; Mierzwinski, Velija, & Malcolm, 2014), show that fighting remains strongly associated with masculinity and that women's entry into martial arts is still resisted in various ways. Despite recent notable exceptions (Blodgett et al., 2017; McGannon et al., 2018; Kavoura, et al., 2014, 2015; Masucci & Butryn, 2015) most of the gender investigations in MACS continue to be sociological. My aim is to contribute to the sport psychology knowledge base by adding to our understanding of the processes of female judoka identity negotiation.



## 2.4 Feminist poststructuralist theorizing

Cultural and feminist critiques of sport align with insights from poststructuralist thought (McGannon & Busanich, 2010). The term *poststructuralism* refers to a range of heterogeneous theoretical positions (e.g., Derridean, Lacanian, and Foucauldian theories; see Weedon, 1997, 2004). In contrast to traditional epistemological approaches that believe in the existence of a pre-given reality that can be objectively observed through cognition, poststructuralist theories give primacy to the constitutive role that language plays in constructing certain realities (Weedon, 1997). It is through language that we assign meaning to the world around us and make sense of our experiences, bodies, and selves (Butler, 1990; McGannon & Busanich, 2010). Moreover, it is through language that power dynamics are (re)produced, and certain concepts (along with the binary hierarchical relationships that come with them) become taken for granted (Foucault, 1972, 1978). For example, feminist theorists, such as Butler, Spivak, and Weedon, appropriated poststructuralist theorizing to explicate how the concepts of *sex* and *gender* are constructed through language. Those scholars further argued that the social construction of hierarchical binaries, such as male/female and masculine/feminine, shape people's conscious and subconscious thoughts, emotions, and attitudes toward themselves and others (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1997).

Feminist poststructuralist theory has been advocated by critical sport psychologists as an appropriate framework for re-examining the experiences and identities of women athletes and exercisers, as it allows us to trace the mechanisms through which women become subjected to particular (and gendered) ways of knowing themselves and others (Baird, 2010; McGannon & Busanich, 2010; Ryba & Wright, 2010), e.g., the "knowing" of men as athletically superior and women as weak and fragile (Markula & Pringle, 2006; Vertinsky, 1994). However, this approach's potential has not yet been realized, as only a few empirical studies grounded in sport and exercise psychology have engaged with feminist poststructuralist theorizing (e.g., McGannon & Schinke, 2013; Roy & Ryba, 2012). In this research, I utilize Foucauldian and feminist poststructuralist theory (drawn from Butler 1990, 1993; Foucault, 1965, 1972, 1977, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Weedon 1997) to explore the experiences and identities of female judo athletes. Drawing on the aforementioned works, I employ a specific use and understanding of analytic tools and terms, such as *discourse*, *subject position*, *subjectivity*, and *identity*. Below, I explain how I use these terms<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> As previously said, poststructuralism is not a homogeneous school of thought, but includes a range of diversified theories. The terms *discourse*, *subject position*, *subjectivity*, and *identity* might be conceptualized differently within these theories. Presenting all different definitions and understandings is beyond the scope of this thesis. In what follows, I have tried to explicate the definitions I used in this research.

### 2.4.1 Foucauldian theory of discourse

Focusing on the social (re)production of power dynamics, Foucault (1972) developed the notion of discourse. For Foucault, discourse is linked to language, but it is more than oral and written communications (Markula & Pringle, 2006). In Foucault's work (and in the works of those who have been inspired by his theory), the term *discourse* refers to ways of thinking, producing meaning, and constituting knowledge (Weedon, 1997). Discourses exist in the social practices of everyday life, determining what is true, natural, good, or scientific (Foucault, 1972; Markula & Pringle, 2006; Pringle, 2014). In other words, Foucault accorded to discourse the privilege of defining the ways in which we understand the world, and he asserted that outside of discourse, thoughts and feelings do not have any meaning (Weedon, 1997).

Discourses reflect the regimes of power and knowledge that are at work in a particular society (Foucault, 1972; Pringle, 2014; Weedon, 1997). Usually, the most powerful discourses have a strong institutional basis, e.g., in law, medicine, education, or in the organization of work and family (Foucault, 1972; Weedon, 1997). However, even the most powerful discourses can be challenged and changed (Weedon, 1997). As long as alternative discourses are in circulation, even if marginal, they offer a space from which individuals can resist the versions of knowledge that dominant discourses offer (Pringle, 2014; Weedon, 1997). However, Foucault (1978) warned us that the relationship between different co-existing discourses is far too complex to be easily deciphered through a binary conceptualization of power. Thus, the identification of "dominant" versus "alternative" discourses should be approached with caution and their hybridity and interrelation should be acknowledged (Thorpe, 2008).

Critical and feminist scholars in sport sociology have drawn on Foucault's theory of discourse to discuss a wide range of topics (see Markula & Pringle, 2006, for an account of existing Foucauldian studies on sport and exercise), including the social construction of gendered and sexualized bodies and identities (Cox & Thompson, 2000; Markula, 1995; Thorpe, 2008). Foucault's theoretical toolbox has yet to be discovered by sport psychologists; however, feminist voices in CSP have started advocating in support of the implications from this line of theorizing for resistance and change in sport and physical-activity practices (McGannon & Busanich, 2010; Ryba & Wright, 2010). Women athletes and exercisers draw on popular discourses circulated in the fitness and sporting cultures (e.g., fitness magazines and sport media) to make sense of their bodies, appearance, and/or athletic performance (e.g., Markula, 1995; McGannon, McMahon, & Gonsalves, 2017; Thorpe, 2008). By intervening in the limited ways in which female bodies are represented in these popular discourses, or by putting into discourse alternative sets of knowledge, we can empower female athletes and exercisers (McGannon & Busanich, 2010; Thorpe, 2008; Woodward, 2014).

### 2.4.2 Subject positions and discursive construction of subjectivity

Within different discourses, a range of subject positions is open for individuals (Weedon, 1997). The term *subject position* refers to locations or categories that include a specific structure of rights and limitations (Davies & Harre, 1990). These subject positions determine the boundaries on what is possible and desirable for people. For example, within discourses of sport and motherhood, the subject positions of *good mother*, *female athlete* and *athlete-mother* are available for women who must position themselves through cultural ideals that articulate who is a good or bad mother, and a good or bad athlete (McGannon et al., 2017). While individuals have the agency to choose between subject positions, certain subject positions are exclusive to a particular class, age, or gender (Weedon, 1997). Moreover, certain subject positions are more privileged, more accessible, or presented as more “natural” than others (Butler, 1990). For example, the *good mother* is constructed as women’s true calling in dominant gender discourses, while the *female athlete* is positioned as secondary and not fulfilling enough (McGannon et al., 2017).

Once we accept a subject position (i.e., we position ourselves as if we belong in one category), we learn to see the world from the viewpoint of this position, and certain forms of subjectivity (i.e., conscious and subconscious thoughts and emotions) open up for us (Davies & Harre, 1990; Weedon, 1997). This means that, for example, women who accept and try to live up to the *good mother* position might feel guilty about spending time doing sports or exercising (McGannon et al., 2017; McGannon & Schinke, 2013).

### 2.4.3 Discursive identity

One complementary link between CSP and feminist poststructuralist theorizing is that they are both skeptical about essentialist understandings of self (Butler, 1990; Pringle, 2014; Ryba & Wright, 2010; Weedon, 1997). Instead, they advocate for a discursive conceptualization of identity, according to which, identities are viewed as cultural constructions accomplished through identifications with (or negotiations of) various discourses of class, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, etc. (McGannon & Busanich, 2010; Ryba & Wright, 2005; Weedon, 2004). Those cultural discourses are often antagonistic and offer multiple and conflicting versions of being in the world (Weedon, 1997). Hence, identities are not stable and singular, but fluid and multiple, resembling a project that is never finished, but always remains under construction (Hall, 1996; Weedon, 2004). The various pieces of this incomplete project are stitched together imperfectly and can be re-arranged, sustained, or abandoned, according to social circumstances, the groups we want to identify with, and the values we wish to share with others (Hall, 1996; Weedon, 2004). Hence, people can construct multiple (and often conflicting) identities, according to the cultural contexts in which they are displaying themselves and the discursive resources and subject positions that are available to them (Butler, 1990).

While individuals have some agency in this process of identity negotiation, certain identities are socially, culturally, or institutionally assigned to us, as identifications with a certain group, class, race, gender, nationality, religion, etc. (Weedon, 2004). Certain ethnic, national, or gendered identifications are imposed or enabled for us through strict bureaucratic procedures, while others are foreclosed and denied (Butler, 1990; Hall, 1996; Weedon, 2004). For example, the identity categories of *women* and *men* are culturally ingrained and socially controlled in ways that are problematic for transgender and intersex individuals (Butler, 1990).

Often, identities require active identification by participating in certain social practices and repeating certain behaviors (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 2004). Butler (1990, 1993) calls this process “performativity,” referring specifically to the repeated assumption of gender identities. According to Butler, feminine or masculine identities are culturally acquired through repetition of certain ways of dressing, walking, talking, and acting. Hence, femininity and masculinity are neither natural, nor biological. Instead, they are performative manifestations (or the effect) of dominant discourses of gender (Butler, 1990, 1993; Weedon, 2004).

By repeatedly performing certain identity norms, these identities are internalized (i.e., they are experienced as second nature and become part of lived subjectivity; Weedon, 2004). Hence, identities are central to the ways through which dominant discourses are reproduced or challenged (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1997). Moreover, identities are central to how individuals position themselves and interact with each other, and to the reproduction of social relations, hierarchies, and inequalities (Hall, 1996; Weedon, 2004).

Identities are also linked to how individuals see themselves and how others define them (Weedon, 2004). Certain identity claims come with certain “looks”; thus, you need to look like a woman, or an athlete, to be perceived as one (Krane et al., 2004). At issue here is how dominant discourses (e.g., of gender and sexuality) are materialized in the body (Butler, 1993). Cultural understandings of ideal looks, movements, weight, etc., or how a body resembles (or differs from) other bodies, become the means to constitute the body, the effects from which we live through (Butler, 1993; Vertinsky, 1994). Since the body is central to identity politics (and the politics of exclusion/inclusion), it becomes the point of application for various disciplinary discursive practices (Hall, 1996; Markula & Pringle, 2006; Foucault, 1977, 1978). For instance, athletes submit their bodies and selves to a range of disciplinary techniques to achieve the standards and norms of elite performance (Cosh, Crabb, LeCouteur, & Kettler, 2012; Markula & Pringle, 2006).

The discursive conceptualization of identity has been advocated by CSP scholars as having the potential to extend our understanding of athletes’ subjective experiences, and to expose the politics of exclusion that operate in sporting cultures (Lee, 2017; Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2016; Ryba & Wright, 2010). Yet, few sport psychology scholars have studied athletes’ identities through this lens (see Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2016, for a review). Discursive approaches are better grounded in exercise psychology, in which the identities of

women exercisers have been theorized as subject positions constructed within particular discourses (e.g., McGannon & Schinke, 2013; McGannon & Spence, 2012). Reformulating Stuart Hall's (1996, p. 14) remarks on identity, the present study grapples with understanding the mechanisms by which female athletes "as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions' to which they are summoned, as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and 'perform' these positions." Below, I describe the specific sporting and societal contexts in which I explore the discursive construction of female athletes' identities.

## 2.5 Positioning the female judoka in the cultural context

In addition to blending theory with research and practice, application of the cultural praxis framework requires infusing those three elements with local specificity (Ryba & Wright, 2010). Sport psychology researchers (and applied practitioners) are encouraged to situate their work in a particular socio-cultural context (Ryba et al., 2013; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). This could be done, for example, by looking at the social and cultural issues that shape athletes' subjectivities in a particular sporting community (Chroni, Diakaki, & Papaioannou, 2013) and by reflecting on the power dynamics that operate in this context and that underpin the psychological processes and practices of athletes (Masucci & Butryn, 2015; Ryba & Wright, 2010). Following a suggestion by Chroni and her colleagues (2013) for using the cultural praxis framework as a way to approach and understand the complexities, hybridity, disorder, and multiplicity that make up a particular sporting community, what follows is an attempt to sketch a Greek and Finnish cultural praxis to understand female judoka's experiences.

### 2.5.1 Greek cultural praxis

Compared with other European countries, Greece is often framed as a relatively patriarchal and masculine culture that gradually is moving toward modernization and individualization, but still holds on to traditional gender values (Chroni et al., 2013; Kyriazis, 1998; Marcos & Bahr, 2001). This view is also supported by data in the *Global Gender Gap Report* (World Economic Forum, 2016) that rank Greece at the bottom for the Western European region. However, a more careful reading, such as that done by Loizos (1994), shows changing gender dynamics and contrasting discourses of masculinity/femininity circulating among different classes, cities, and regions of Greece. Maleness and femaleness are not exactly the subjects of widespread cultural consensus, but in most contexts, masculine identities continue to be more valued than feminine (Loizos, 1994). These ideas of masculine superiority are reproduced in multiple ways by both men and women, as well as by powerful institutions, such as the family, religion, and the military (Athanasiadis, 2007; Kyriazis, 1998; Loizos, 1994). Even though the idea of a hegemonic masculine identity is problematic and oppressive to both men and women (Loizos, 1994), Greek men are not readily



willing to give up on this position (Athanasiadis, 2007) and have been found to hold less-egalitarian attitudes than women do, even men who are well-educated (Marcos & Bahr, 2001).

One of these cultural contexts in Greece (and elsewhere) is sports, in which masculine identities are overvalued (Xanthi, 2013) and traditional patriarchal values tend to persist (Grigriou, Chroni, Hatzigeorgiadis, & Theodorakis, 2011). Sport studies reveal that the patriarchal and sexist discourses that are circulated in Greece influence the proportions of women participating in sports and physical activity, as well as the representation of women in sport-leadership roles (Chroni, Kourtesopoulou, & Kouli, 2007; van Tuyckom, Scheerder, & Bracke, 2010; Xanthi, 2013). Comparing gender inequalities in sport participation across Europe, van Tuyckom et al. (2010) found that Greece has one of the lowest female-participation levels. Women athletes are hesitant to take up coaching, refereeing, and administrative roles, feeling that they would not be respected due to their gender (Chroni et al., 2007). Chroni (2006) argued that this discourse of female biological athletic inferiority is embedded even in the curricula and structures of institutions in which physical-education instructors and sport coaches are educated. Being educated in such sexist and gender-segregated context(s), it is no wonder that both male and female physical-education teachers reproduce the same practices and gender stereotypes when working in sport clubs or schools.

A recent study by Xanthi (2013) also sheds light on how gender dynamics and stereotypes are reproduced in the male-dominated culture of elite sports. Xanthi (2013) argued that sports remain highly gendered in Greece (certain activities are stereotypically seen as masculine and others as feminine) and that family has a dominant influence on sport involvement. Female athletes in "masculine" sports, such as judo, wrestling, and boxing, were found to have a lower-class socio-economic and educational background (Xanthi, 2013). In many instances, their atypical sports choices were influenced by male significant others (e.g., fathers), while receiving less acceptance and support from their mothers (compared with athletes in "feminine" sports, such as rhythmic gymnastics and synchronized swimming), and being treated negatively by coaches, federations, and the media (Xanthi, 2013). Further research is needed to understand how female Greek athletes construct gender and negotiate identity, while facing the patriarchal beliefs of their coaches and significant others, and while being subjected to dominant gender stereotypes in Greece.

### **2.5.2 Finnish cultural praxis**

Finland has a long tradition of equality-promoting legislation and was the first country in the world to grant women the right to both vote and stand for election to Parliament (Sulkunen, 2007). Statistical reports depict Finland as the second most gender-equal country in the world (World Economic Forum, 2016) and the second-best country in which to be a girl (Save the Children, 2016). Equality is considered one of the most important societal values in Finland (Brunila & Ylöstalo, 2015; Laine, Salasuo, & Matilainen, 2016), and compliance



with gender-equality laws is supervised through several state mechanisms (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2016).

However, research suggests that inequalities between women and men continue to exist in Finland, and in practice, many aspects of gender equality have remained under the levels suggested by international comparisons (Brunila & Ylöstalo, 2015; Turpeinen, Jaako, Kankaanpää, & Hakamäki, 2012). For instance, a gender pay gap continues to exist (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2011), as does traditional, gendered inequality in the division of domestic work and child care (Statistics Finland, 2016). Hyvärinen (2017) argues that gender equality is actually encountering a backlash in Finland. When gender equality is talked about as something that already has been achieved, problems such as bypassing and downplaying gender issues begin to occur (Hyvärinen, 2017). Along the same lines, Brunila and Ylöstalo (2015) brought to light the following paradox: While equality is becoming an export commodity in Finland, promoting equality within is actually meeting much resistance. Talking about inequalities in a society that proudly presents itself as the model country for gender equality becomes a threat to societal ideals (Brunila & Ylöstalo, 2015).

In the Finnish world of sports, analogous contradictions exist (Larsson, 2014). On one hand, Finland is among the few European countries that started to prioritize gender equality in sport coaching and instructor training, and it adopted mentoring as a way of promoting the status of women in various sport-related positions (European Commission, 2014; Turpeinen et al., 2012). On the other hand, Finnish women remain underrepresented in receiving financial support from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish Olympic Committee (Turpeinen et al., 2012), as well as in serving in managerial and coaching positions (European Commission, 2014; Turpeinen et al., 2012). Despite positive developments related to the status of gender equality in sport during the last decade (Turpeinen & Hakamäki, 2018), research shows that female athletes continue to feel less competent than males and, consequently, less interested in positions of leadership (Ronkainen, Watkins, & Ryba, 2016). Moreover, only 2% of the professional athletes in Finland are women (Turpeinen & Hakamäki, 2018). Research also suggests that, regardless of projects and campaigns aiming to promote gender equality and to increase the number of females participating in male-dominated sports (Hokka, 2014; Larsson, 2014), sports in Finland continue to be heavily gendered at all levels and ages (Suomi et al., 2012). Traditionally, sports that rely on vigorous physical contact, such as ice hockey, are perceived as masculine (Laine, 2004; Pirinen, 2006; Turpeinen, et al., 2012), while women and girls have had an easier time gaining access to aesthetic or expressive sports (traditionally seen as feminine), such as gymnastics, figure skating, dance, and horse riding (Statistics Finland, 2016; Turpeinen & Hakamäki, 2018).

In this contradictory sporting context, surprisingly few empirical studies have investigated the lived experiences of female Finnish athletes. Most gender-related research has been conducted in the fields of sport journalism and media studies, indicating that sports coverage in Finland is often heavily gendered

(Kaivossari, 2017; Pirinen, 2006; Turtiainen, 2010). Turtiainen (2010) argued that when female athletes get some media attention, the focus is typically on attractiveness, relationship status, or motherhood. The female athlete is portrayed in rather contradictory ways, as heroic and successful, but also as a heterosexual, girly object, whose achievements, records, performances, and athletic skills do not need to be taken seriously (Kaivosaari, 2017; Pirinen, 2006). However, Kaivosaari (2017) argued that there have been some positive changes in the last few years and that Finnish media nowadays tend to focus more on achievements and less on attractiveness (and other irrelevant issues) when covering female athletes.

The few empirical studies that have explored the experiences of female Finnish athletes (all conducted by female researchers) reveal that even in the egalitarian Finnish context, girls and women's participation in sports is constrained by gender hierarchies (Herrala, 2015, 2016; Kavoura et al., 2015; Rannikko, 2016; Ronkainen, Watkins, & Ryba, 2016). Ronkainen et al. (2016) explored the gendered experiences of Finnish distance runners and found that female athletes were more likely to experience psychological distress and loneliness during the final years of their athletic careers because they were influenced by dominant cultural narratives that construct elite sports as a youthful pursuit that is incompatible with being a grown woman, a mother, and a wife. Kavoura et al. (2015) found that female Finnish BJJ athletes had to come up with various strategies to overcome gender hierarchies in martial arts to advance their careers. Moreover, Herrala (2015) studied female adolescents' experiences in ice hockey and argued that by playing the "masculine" national game of Finland, these young women were challenging the traditional gender order, but at the same time, they were reproducing the old biology-based stereotypes of males being more physical, aggressive, and enduring, and thereby able to develop athletically more than females. Furthermore, in Rannikko's (2016) study on the experiences of alternative-sport participants, female roller-derby players proudly stressed the aggressive, full-contact nature of their sport. They talked about tackling and body contact as something that they enjoy (previously impossible for them), viewing bruises as a sign of good training. Female skateboarders, on the other hand, talked about the stigma of being viewed as just skateboarders' girlfriends, adding that they must work very hard by developing their skills to escape this false stereotype (Rannikko, 2016). Overall, these studies foreground and confirm the need to further investigate the subjective experiences of female athletes in Finland to shed light on how and why the actual practices relating to gender equality in sports vary from the statistics published in equality reports.

### 2.5.3 Contextualizing judo

Judo is a sport with Japanese origins, founded in the late 19th century by Jigoro Kano (Miarka et al., 2011). Kano was a physical-education instructor with a martial-arts background in *Jujutsu* (the ancient fighting system of feudal Japan). His vision was to develop a holistic model of physical education that would

train body, mind, and spirit (Kano, 2005). He created a system that consists of throws and ground techniques (such as chokes and armlocks) and named it *judo* (which means “the gentle way”; Miarka et al., 2011). In his teachings (which are influential even today), judo was promoted as an inclusive sport that could be practiced by every citizen, regardless of age, size, or gender (Groenen, 2012; Kano, 2005; Miarka et al., 2011).

However, the few scholars who have examined the history of women’s involvement in judo (e.g., Groenen 2012; Miarka et al., 2011) argue that in practice, judo never was as inclusive as its promotion touted and that the male-oriented socio-cultural context(s) of judo discriminated against women since the very beginning. Miarka et al. (2011) provide evidence that from 1882 until the late 1960s, female judoka in Japan were restricted to softer forms of training (*kata*) and that they were not allowed to practice fighting (*randori*). Moreover, because of their “fragile” biological nature, women were not allowed to compete, and women’s judo did not become an Olympic sport until 1992. It has been an Olympic sport for men since 1964 (Miarka et al., 2011). Groenen (2012) similarly argued that in Belgium, the development of women’s judo was constrained by dominant patriarchal ideologies that framed women as fragile and biologically inferior to men. Women were allowed to practice judo, but like Japan, they had to remain within certain limits fixed by men (Groenen, 2012). Their involvement was encouraged only as a form of self-defense, and any efforts to participate in competition encountered strong resistance. While Groenen (2012) provides evidence that the early development of women’s judo in Belgium was linked to women’s struggles for emancipation and (to some degree) to the feminist movement of the time, he interestingly concludes that the progress achieved was the result of efforts made “by male pioneers and their open-mindedness” (p. 1824).

Today, judo is a highly competitive Olympic sport for both men and women (Svinth, 2001). According to statistics published at sports-reference.com, 2,724 judo athletes from 180 countries have participated so far in the Olympics: 1,966 men and 757 women. Moreover, it is estimated that more than 2 million people currently practice judo in Europe ([www.judoliitto.fi/judo/alasivu](http://www.judoliitto.fi/judo/alasivu)). While judo competitions are sex-segregated (i.e., men and women compete in different categories), training sessions are usually mixed-gender (i.e., men and women practice together, during which they often fight against each other; Guerandel & Mennesson, 2007). Women have demonstrated their ability to endure the physical and psychological hardships of the elite judo system (a system that is often rather harsh and unhealthy; d’Arripe-Longueville, Fournier, & Dubois, 1998). In fact, the top medalist in judo is Japan’s female athlete Ryoko Tamura-Tani, who holds a record seven world titles and five Olympic medals<sup>6</sup>. However, beliefs about the athletic inferiority of females that led to gender hierarchies and structures of masculine domination continue to prevail in judo *dojos* (martial arts schools; Guerandel & Mennesson, 2007), and women remain

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<sup>6</sup> Information retrieved on December 13, 2017 from [sports-reference.com/Olympics/sports/JUD](http://sports-reference.com/Olympics/sports/JUD) and from [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ryoko\\_Tani](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ryoko_Tani)

underrepresented at all levels (as practitioners and athletes, as well as in coaching and managerial placements; e.g., Sindik, Rendulić, Čorak, & Perinić Lewis, 2014).

At the international level, judo remains a sport taught and organized by men (e.g., the current *Executive Committee* of the International Judo Federation consists of 23 members, among whom only one is female<sup>7</sup>). In Greece, the board of the Hellenic Judo Federation consists of 15 members, among whom only two are women<sup>8</sup>. Reflecting gender-equality policies and values circulated in Finland, the board of the Finnish Judo Association consists of 10 members, among whom five are women<sup>9</sup>. According to information retrieved from the webpages of the Hellenic Judo Federation and Finnish Judo Association, in both countries, judo has been practiced since the 1950s. In Greece, there are 67 judo clubs listed in the webpages of the Hellenic Judo Federation. In Finland, a country with half the population<sup>10</sup> of Greece, there are more than 120 clubs with approximately 12,500 active participants. However, the picture changes when it comes to female participation in judo competitions. Only 20 women participated in the 2017 Finnish Nationals of judo, while 42 women competed in the 2016 Greek Nationals. The numbers become even smaller when it comes to participation in international competitions. These sad numbers reveal that research-based knowledge on how to promote female participation in judo and how to better support the careers of female athletes is much-needed in both countries.

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<sup>7</sup> Information retrieved from the official website of the International Judo Federation ([www.ijf.org/ijf/organization](http://www.ijf.org/ijf/organization)) on November 7, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Information retrieved from the official website of the Hellenic Judo Federation ([hj.f.gr/fed1.php](http://hj.f.gr/fed1.php)) on December 13, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Information retrieved from the official website of the Finnish Judo Association ([judoliitto.fi/judoliitto/ihmiset/hallitus](http://judoliitto.fi/judoliitto/ihmiset/hallitus)) on December 13, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> According to Wikipedia, the 2016 estimated population of Greece is 11,183,716, while the 2017 estimated population of Finland is 5,509,717.

### 3 AIMS OF STUDY

The purpose of this ethnographic research project was to explore the ways through which female judoka's experiences and identities are shaped by the cultural context, and to reveal the mechanisms through which gender inequalities in judo are reproduced. Two main research questions guided the study:

- (1) What are the discourses through which female Greek and Finnish judoka articulate and make sense of their experiences?
- (2) How do female judoka negotiate their identities in relation to the dominant discourses that are circulated in their cultural contexts?

Under the umbrella of these two main research questions, the following sub-questions were asked (and answered) in the original publications:

- How is the female martial artist discursively constructed in the sport psychology scholarship? What research questions do sport psychologists tend to investigate when studying psychological issues in MACS? What theories inform their research on gender? (I)
- What are the discourses through which female Greek judoka articulate and make sense of their experiences? How do they negotiate their identities in relation to these discourses? (II)
- How is judo discursively constructed in female Finnish judoka's talks? How do they negotiate their identities in relation to the cultural discourses circulated in the Finnish judo community? (III)
- How does the researcher negotiate researcher and athlete identities when moving from the Greek to the Finnish socio-cultural judo contexts? (IV)

This dissertation brings together results from the original publications to answer the two main research questions. Each research question is answered with a separate sub-section in the *Results and Discussion* part of this dissertation. Specifically, research question (1) is answered in sub-section 5.1, and research question (2) is answered in sub-section 5.2.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Epistemology and methodological choices: ethnography and discourse analysis

My methodological choices were guided by a constructionist epistemology, according to which there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it (Crotty, 1998). Instead, what we know as true is produced and limited by the cultural meanings and interpretations available to us. Adhering to this epistemological stance, in this research, I have theorized knowledge as constructed in human interactions via language and discourse. These assumptions led me to ethnography and discourse analysis as suitable methodologies to explore the (re)production of certain knowledges in judo, and how these are related to identity construction and the perpetuation of gender inequalities.

Discourse analysis is a sound methodology for exploring issues related to knowledge, power, and social inequalities, as it is through discourse that we construct social differences (gendered, racial, etc.) and rationalize inequality (Heller, Pietikäinen, & Pujolar, 2018). However, these explorations should be situated within specific historical and socio-cultural conditions and contexts. Ethnography allows for such in-depth, situated explorations (Sands, 2002). In the present study, I combine ethnography with discourse analysis. These methodological strategies align well with the cultural praxis framework (McGannon & Smith, 2015; Ryba & Wright, 2010). While combining these methods is not yet popular (and may even be nonexistent) in sport psychology, scholars from fields such as sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology have drawn on combinations of these methods to explore issues of social inequality (e.g., Heller et al., 2018). I am drawing on these methods to advance the sport psychology research base by enhancing our understanding of how gendered inequalities are reproduced within sporting cultures.



#### 4.1.1 Foucauldian discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is an umbrella term for several approaches, such as sociolinguistics, discursive psychology, critical discourse analysis, and Foucauldian discourse analysis (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001). Each of these traditions is subject to its own assumptions and dimensions of analysis. However, discursive investigations generally agree on the central role that language plays in constituting social and psychological phenomena, and focus on discourse as the object of analysis (Wetherell et al., 2001; Willig, 2008). While discourse analysis has a long tradition in fields such as sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and linguistics, it is a relatively new approach in sport psychology (Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2016). A few scholars have drawn on discursive psychology to explore constructions of motherhood in relation to sports and exercise (e.g., McGannon & Schinke, 2013; McGannon et al., 2017) and media constructions of athletic retirement (e.g., Cosh, Crabb, and LeCouteur, 2013). Others have drawn on Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) to explore racial microaggressions in sports (Lee, 2017) and the emotional embodiment of Muslim women athletes (Roy & Ryba, 2012). In this study, I draw on FDA to trace the discourses circulated in judo contexts and to explore the identity negotiation of female judoka.

FDA is influenced by Foucault's theory of discourse (described in Section 2.4) and is concerned with the availability of discursive resources within a culture and its implications for those who live in the culture (Willig, 2008). FDA asks questions about the relationship between discourse and how people think or feel, and in what kinds of practices they participate (Willig, 2008). The focus is on the power dynamics that operate in a particular society and how they are discursively reproduced (Markula & Pringle, 2006). In this research, I have employed the stepwise approach to FDA proposed by Willig (2008). The specific steps that I followed are described in detail in Section 4.6.

#### 4.1.2 Feminist ethnography

Ethnography is the signature method of traditional cultural anthropology, and it is used today in many academic fields, e.g., sociology, cultural studies, and feminist studies (Sands, 2002). Although ethnography might draw on a variety of epistemological and methodological research traditions, it is guided by some common beliefs: It is nonpositivist, historically situated, and acknowledges the influence of the researcher on research (Krane & Baird, 2005). Ethnography aims to understand the culture of a particular group from the perspective of the group members (Krane & Baird, 2005; Sands, 2002). It involves the use of data emerging from immersion into a cultural context, such as participant-observations, interviews, and collecting cultural artifacts (Krane & Baird, 2005; Sands, 2002; Sparkes, 2002). Through ethnographic fieldwork, the qualitative researcher seeks to "get inside" the field of research, capture cultural phenomena and local experiences, and gain insights into the behaviors, values, emotions, and mental states of group members (Krane & Baird, 2005).

Ethnographic approaches have been undertaken to study sport cultures, e.g., rugby (Baird, 2010), ice hockey (Herrala, 2015; Theberge, 1995, 2005), snowboarding (Thorpe, 2005, 2008, 2011), and MACS (Garcia & Spencer, 2013; Masucci & Butryn, 2015; Matthews, 2016; Woodward, 2008), among others. Since these sport cultures are largely dominated by men, many of the aforementioned studies adopted a feminist approach aimed at revealing problematic (e.g., sexist) cultural norms and values that are circulated within these cultural contexts and constrain the experiences of women and girls (Baird, 2010; Herrala, 2015; Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Theberge, 1995, 2005; Thorpe, 2005, 2008, 2011). The present study also is directed toward this aim.

However, employing a feminist ethnographic approach entails much more than simply documenting gender inequalities. Feminist ethnographers need to reflect on how feminist politics could be translated into actions while doing research in the field (Olive & Thorpe, 2011, 2018). Olive and Thorpe (2018) illustrate examples of strategies that can be employed by feminist ethnographers to challenge the problematic cultural norms that operate in the fields under study, such as contributing to the communities that we are studying by communicating our results in accessible ways, and reflecting on our role(s) and “feminist failures” (p.116) in the field. Following this suggestion, I reflect below on how my researcher positioning (i.e. nationality, gender, age, judo experience, and language skills) influenced this project and I explain how autoethnography proved to be a useful tool for reflecting on my multiple identities (and failures) in the field.

## 4.2 Reflexivity

The value of reflexivity, as a method to legitimize, validate, and challenge research practices and representations, has been discussed by several qualitative scholars (e.g. Ellis, 2004; Haraway, 1988; McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Tracy, 2010). Those scholars have encouraged us to acknowledge our personal experiences, embrace the multiplicity of our identities, and reflect on how our own positioning and subjectivities have shaped our research processes (McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Woodward, 2008). They have argued that being transparent about the challenges that we have met and the mistakes that we have made is one of the key markers of quality in qualitative and ethnographic research (Richardson, 2000; Tracy, 2010). Reflexivity also requires that we discuss and explain the position from which we speak, both as scientists and as inhabitants of our times, places, and histories (Heller et al., 2018). This involves reflecting on our own theoretical and political affiliations, as these inform the topics of our study and the perspectives from which we study them (Heller et al., 2018; Matthews, 2015).

#### 4.2.1 Reflecting on my role in this research: From ethnography to autoethnography

My personal experiences were central to this study. While there are many academically sound reasons to explore how cultural discourses influence the identity negotiation of female judoka in Greece and Finland (for example, Greece is a culture characterized by persisting gender inequalities, while Finland is considered to be one of the most gender-equal countries in the world; see EIGE, 2017), my motivation for this study did not arise from the numbers published in statistical reports, but from my own experiences of living and training in these two countries.

I started judo in Greece (my home country) in 2003, when I was a 19-year-old physical education university student. My early experiences in the sport echo the findings on women fighters who struggle to strike a balance between muscularity and socially accepted femininity. I can recall times when I felt discriminated against and harassed because of my gender. I can also remember myself accepting (or even reproducing) normative hierarchies and stereotypes.

I first visited Finland in 2006 as an exchange student. Charmed by this equality-orientated culture and its educational system, I decided to stay and continue my studies in Finland. Since then, I have been living between the two cultures, and I have been training and competing in both.

My involvement in judo has passed through different phases during the years. There were times when judo was my main sport and I was training regularly and intensively. At other times I had to take a break from judo, because of injuries or because of an affair that I had started with BJJ. While I never reached an elite level in judo, I have occasionally tried my chances (and sometimes medaled) in local and national level tournaments. Most of the women that I interviewed were more skilled, committed, and successful in judo than I have ever been. However, my several years of training judo allowed me to “gain access” and pass as an “insider” (Matthews, 2015; Woodward, 2008). I was able to keep up with the training sessions during the data collection and I shared the same understandings of judo-related social practices (i.e. judo-specific language, habits, and values) with the participants. Having the same gender and being close to the mean age of the interviewees was also helpful in gaining access and establishing trust and rapport.

My nationality also played a role in this research. In Publication IV, I made myself the subject of analysis, and I employed the analytic autoethnography method proposed by Anderson (2006) to reflect on my own subjectification to certain cultural discourses and how my own understandings (of gender, age, physicality etc.) were challenged when I moved from Greece to Finland. Autoethnography also allowed me to reflect on the ways that I navigated between multiple and sometimes contradictory roles and positions in the field (e.g., the athlete, the researcher, and the feminist) and to account for the relationship between the personal, the cultural, and the political (Ellis, 2004).

Overall, doing feminist ethnographic research in judo (a male-dominated martial art that I have been practicing for years and in which I have developed personal relationships) was a fulfilling, but also frustrating experience. Despite all

the pleasures of using my body as an instrument for data collection in a sport that I enjoy practicing, I was constantly worried about how my research and feminist positioning would influence my relationships in the field, and vice versa. While writing my autoethnography helped me to make sense of my experiences in the field and improved my theoretical understanding of certain social and psychological phenomena in judo, I can vividly recall unsettling moments (Butryn et al., 2014; Olive & Thorpe, 2018) during which I struggled with thoughts such as: What would person x or field y think about me after reading this autoethnography? Eventually, I ended up polishing or even omitting certain parts of the text. This feminist failure (as well as many others) helped me better understand the power relations that I am subjected to and made me more aware of the multiple ways in which I, myself, might be reproducing the same dynamics that I seek to challenge.

#### **4.2.2 Reflecting on language issues in data collection and analysis**

Much research today involves international data collection, and language boundaries are frequently crossed when the researcher and the participants do not share the same mother tongue. Moreover, an increased number of researchers are obliged to rely on more than one language (the dominant one being English) to bear the demands of today's globalized academic world. Researchers bring multiple languages to the research process (for example, they might collect and analyze the data in one language, but write the results in another); yet, the methodological implications of these practices are rarely discussed (Brannen, Piekkari, & Tietze, 2014). While some reflexive accounts exist, for example on conducting qualitative interviews in a second language (e.g. Welch & Piekkari, 2005), to my knowledge no established methodological protocols for dealing with such issues exist.

Poststructuralist theory alerts us to the role that language plays in shaping meaning and constructing knowledge (Weedon, 1997; Willig, 2008) and impels me to reflect on the ways that language shaped my decisions and interpretations during the research process. As far as language skills are concerned, I speak Greek (mother-tongue) and English (fluently), but I have problems in expressing myself in Finnish. While I can understand Finnish to the extent that I recognize the main topic of a conversation and understand the instructions given in training, my ability to actively participate in interaction (in Finnish) is rather limited. This led to the following methodological decisions: Interviews in Greece were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed in Greek. Only the quotes that have been included in publications were translated into English. Interviews in Finland were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed in English. This meant that I recruited athletes who were comfortable in expressing themselves in English. Athletes who were not fluent in English had to be excluded from the study. Luckily, the majority of Finnish adult athletes are competent in English. Despite the fact that both I and the participants felt comfortable using English during the interviews, we might have been influenced by the language systems and interpretive frames of our respective mother tongues when exchanging information in English. Thinking in one language and speaking in another complicates the exchange of meanings during the interview process (Brannen et al., 2014).

Language also influenced my observations during fieldwork. For example, during fieldwork in Greece, I paid much attention to language per se (i.e. specific words, phrases, gender-syntax, etc.) commonly used in judo training. During fieldwork in Finland, my focus shifted to observing the performative aspects of interaction: for instance, the body and how it moves, whose bodies are celebrated, are more visible, or occupy more space than others. I also became more attentive to my feelings (i.e. how certain practices in the training made me feel more or less frustrated/motivated/included etc.). These issues became the central focus of my autoethnography (Publication IV).

My discursive analytic procedure also focused on the performative aspect of language, and on the role of discourse in making sense and constructing identity, rather than on language per se. While I acknowledge that my data collection and analysis might have been compromised by the use of a second language, I also believe that I have brought a unique perspective to the study of gender identities in judo: the perspective of someone who is neither an “insider” nor an “outsider” (Woodward, 2008), but “observes” the phenomena while constantly moving between cultures. Below, I discuss in detail the exact methods that I used to collect the data for this study.

### **4.3 Methods**

Data for this ethnographic doctoral study were collected via semi-structured interviews and participant-observation. In this section, I discuss these methods in detail.

#### **4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews (Galletta, 2012; Patton, 2015) helped me develop an understanding of how female judoka in Greece and Finland make sense of their sport experiences. Semi-structured interviewing offers great potential for attending to the complexities of lived experience and psychological phenomena; it is sufficiently structured to address the issues of interest consistently, while leaving space to both the participant and researcher to touch upon additional topics and meanings (Galletta, 2012).

An interview guide was developed based on my experiences in judo and the extant literature on the topic. To test the interview guide, I conducted two pilot interviews with female Finnish BJJ athletes. Following the pilot interviews, the questions were slightly edited and re-organized to offer a better flow in the discussion. The final version of the interview guide is available as an Appendix. I used this interview guide to ensure that certain issues would be addressed consistently in all interviews with female judoka in Greece and Finland. However, the guide evolved in each interview, depending on the experiences of each participant, as both the interviewee and I had the freedom to discuss issues that were not in the interview guide.

Specifically, all participants were asked when, how, and why they started practicing judo and to narrate their sport careers. They also were asked about positive and negative moments, as well as major challenges faced in their careers and how they coped with these challenges. Moreover, participants explicitly were asked for their opinions on why few women practice judo at their clubs (and in general), as well as what kinds of strategies could be used to increase the number of female participants. At the end of each interview, I thanked the participants and asked them if they had anything to add that was not previously addressed. Whenever possible, the participants chose the time and place for their interviews.

### **4.3.2 Participant-observation**

To better contextualize my interviews, I also used the participant-observation method (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Patton, 2015), in which the researcher takes part in the daily activities of a group of people to learn about their lived experiences and cultures (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Participant-observation is viewed as the foundation method for ethnographic research, and it entails systematic recording of observations in field notes (Krane & Baird, 2005; Sands, 2002). Moreover, participant-observation in sport settings entails the use of one's own body as an instrument for data collection and interpretation of meanings (Matthews, 2015).

The first step in conducting participant-observation is gaining access to the field or culture under study. As a member of the judo community, I was able to gain access to judo clubs, competitions, training camps, and other judo-related events with relative ease. However, putting all these experiences -- training, competing, sweating, bleeding, laughing, and crying together with the participants -- into words was not easy. At first, I brought my notebook with me during training, and I tried to jot down brief notes during water breaks. However, I quickly abandoned this method, as I felt that it disturbed both me and the people in the field. Instead, I learned how to make "mental notes" of the details I observed, and I started typing my extended field notes at home immediately after every training session or other judo-related event.

During the process of data collection, I maintained a detailed research/training journal, in which I systematically recorded my experiences and observations in the field. Each field-work entry contained a date, place of observation, description of events and interactions that occurred, summaries of conversations, and, whenever possible, exact phrases or language that speakers used. In the same journal, after describing the daily events and interactions, I reflected on my personal experiences and feelings as an athlete, a researcher, a woman, and a feminist.

## **4.4 Procedure**

Ethnographic fieldwork took place in Greece between November 2010 and May 2012, and in Finland between October 2013 and April 2014. In Greece, most of



the fieldwork was conducted at two judo clubs located in two different cities. These clubs purposefully were selected because a relatively large number of female athletes was training there. In this dissertation, I refer to these clubs as *GR1* and *GR2*. Both clubs were male-dominated, in the sense that they had more male than female athletes; however, *GR2* had a female coach and more female athletes than *GR1*. A typical training session at *GR2* included approximately 10 male and six female athletes, while a typical training session at *GR1* included 10 male and four female athletes. Both teams were competition-orientated, focusing on high-intensity training, and the female athletes were highly skilled competitors, distinguished at the national level.

In Finland, most of the fieldwork was conducted at one local judo club at which I had trained in the past. In this dissertation, I refer to this club as *FI1*, which was selected for accessibility reasons. At the time of data collection, approximately 14 athletes were training during a typical training session at *FI1*, among which three were women.

Verbal permission to be part of the study was granted by the head coaches of the three clubs, who were informed about the study's purpose. A total of 79 entries (276 pages) were recorded in the researcher's journal during fieldwork in Greece, and 38 entries (192 pages) were recorded during fieldwork in Finland.

Having established relationships with the athletes through my involvement in training sessions, training camps, and tournaments, participants were recruited for individual semi-structured interviews. The locations of the interviews varied from quiet coffee shops and participants' residences, to university offices, training institutes, and competition arenas. One interview was conducted online via Skype (see Sullivan, 2012, for the appropriateness of using Skype for qualitative data collection). The purpose of the inquiry was explained, and a consent form was signed before each interview. Interviews lasted 20 to 60 minutes each and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

## 4.5 Participants

The interviewees comprised 10 Greek and nine Finnish female judoka (pseudonyms are used when referring to them in this dissertation). The Greek interviewees (Table 1) had a median age of 29 at the time of data collection (range 17 to 40) and a median training experience of 13 years (range 5 to 21). Five of them were active competitors, and the other five were retired elite athletes, four of whom were working as coaches. The Finnish interviewees (Table 2) had a median age of 30 years at the time of data collection (range 20 to 49 years) and a median training experience of 12 years (range 4 to 20 years). Five of them were competing at the international level (of whom one was a Paralympic athlete), two were competing at the national level, and two were retired elite athletes involved with coaching and administration.



Table 1 Greek participants' demographic and interview information

Pseudonym	Age	Training years	Competition status	Location of interview	Interview length (in mins.)
Alexandra	17	11	National-level competitor	Judo club's cafe	20.13
Anastatia	29	21	Retired elite athlete involved in coaching	Participant's home	47.05
Eleftheria	17	6	National-level competitor	Quiet café	25.29
Elpida	36	14	Retired elite athlete	Judo club's cafe	22.54
Eva	18	6	National-level competitor	Judo club's cafe	34.16
Korina	27	20	National/Olympic team athlete	Competition arena	30.21
Maria	29	5	National-level competitor	Participant's home	21.04
Martha	35	17	Retired elite athlete, involved in coaching	Participant's home	51.05
Melina	40	20	Retired elite athlete, involved in coaching	Participant's home	60.49
Sotiria	31	12	Retired elite athlete involved in coaching	Participant's home	26.35

Table 2 Finnish participants' demographic and interview information<sup>11</sup>

Pseudonym	Age	Training years	Competition status	Location/medium of interview	Interview length (in mins.)
Eliisa	20	10	National team athlete	Training institute	34.45
Elli	23	14	National/Olympic team athlete	Training institute	26.59
Hannaleena	28	4	National-level competitor	University office	38.08
Heli	43	8	National-level competitor	University office	48.17
Jenni	49	12	Retired elite athlete, involved in coaching and administration	Training institute	40.04
Liina	27	17	National team athlete	Training institute	28.21
Martta	31	20	National/Olympic team athlete	Skype	49.59
Piia	30	19	Retired elite athlete, involved in coaching	Training institute	33.14
Sara	37	7	National/Paralympic team athlete	Training institute	25.35

## 4.6 Data analysis

My analysis in this study focused on the interviews and was informed by my observations and theoretical framework. Analysis was a continual process that

<sup>11</sup> Table reprinted from publication III.

began as soon as I started transcribing the interviews. During transcription (which I did myself), I started highlighting interesting stories, as well as common patterns, meanings, and language shared by the judoka, and I started making notes about how these data are linked to the extant literature, as well as how they could be interpreted through the lens of my theoretical framework. The interview transcripts were read, re-read, and discussed with the supervisors of this study, who furthered my interpretations by encouraging reflection with the theory.

After having immersed myself in the data, the interview transcripts were analyzed following Willig's (2008) stepwise approach to FDA. Specifically, I first sought self-related talk (e.g., the various ways that female judoka constructed themselves as "strong," "weak," "feminine," etc.), as well as discursive constructions of judo (i.e., the various ways in which female judoka referred to judo, e.g., as a "sport for all," "male domain," etc.). Second, I placed these discursive constructions within wider sport and societal discourses circulating in the judo communities (e.g., a female biological inferiority discourse, discourses of ideal femininity, etc.). After that, I explored how female judoka negotiated their identities by considering (a) what possibilities for action the identified discursive constructions offered to the athletes, (b) what subject positions were available for the athletes within the identified sport and societal discourses, and (c) what were the practical and psychological implications of adopting or rejecting the available subject positions.

Finally, after having analyzed the interview data, I re-visited my research/training journal, looking at how the identified discourses manifested themselves in my field notes. In the following chapter, I discuss my results.

## 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Discourses on sports and gender in Greece and Finland

The FDA revealed five discourses as relevant to the ways that female Greek judoka make sense of themselves and their experiences: a *female biological inferiority discourse*, a *patriarchal discourse*, an *ideal femininity discourse*, an *alternative femininity discourse*, and a *performance discourse* (II). In Finland, two sets of antagonistic discourses were identified: a *mass sport discourse* vs. an *elite sport discourse* and a *gender equality discourse* vs. a *female biological inferiority discourse* (III). In the original publications (II and III), I used interview data to discuss how female judoka draw on these discourses when talking about their sport experiences. In Publication IV, I drew on field-note data to discuss my own subjectification to some of these discourses.

In this dissertation, I expand my analysis of discourses by bringing interview data and field notes together to show how discourses, practices, and identities interrelate, and how they are constitutive and constituted by each other. Moreover, while in the original publications, I discussed the discourses circulated in Greece and Finland separately (Publication II discusses the circulation of discourses in Greece, while Publication III discusses the circulation of discourses in Finland), in this dissertation, I synthesized my analysis of discourses, focusing on the differences and similarities in the discursive experiences of Greek and Finnish judoka.

#### 5.1.1 Female biological inferiority discourse

One powerful discourse circulating in judo realms in both Greece and Finland is the discourse of female biological inferiority. The core rationality of this discourse is that women are biologically ill-suited for physically demanding activities (Milner & Braddock, 2016; Vertinsky, 1994). In the context of judo, this refers to fighting and competition (see Publication III for the different ways in which female judoka construct judo, and consequently fighting and competi-

tion). This discourse is linked to the discursive construction of sex as a biological fact (Butler, 1990). Based on this universal assumption, bodies are categorized as male or female, and certain physical and psychological attributes are assigned to them since birth, e.g., competitiveness, aggression, and strength are assigned to male bodies, while sensitivity, modesty, and being kind, cooperative, and dependent are characteristics assigned to female bodies (Holmes, 2009). The discursive construction of gender differences has led to certain fields and disciplines being perceived as male (Walsh, 2001; Weedon, 1997). For instance, sports that are viewed as violent, involve high injury risks, and require tolerance to pain are typically perceived as masculine (Baird, 2010; Markula & Pringle, 2006; Matthews, 2014, 2016; Young, White, & McTeer, 1994).

The female biological inferiority discourse circulated in judo contexts frames male bodies as strong and aggressive, and female bodies as frail and fragile. It is frequently employed to justify the underrepresentation of women in judo, or the high levels of female dropouts. As Martha and Liina said:

Women by nature cannot (do judo). They do not like to toil much. Their bodies also do not help them. They get injured a lot (Martha, GR).

Well, I think one reason why not many women like to do judo is that they need to deal with the pain. Because sometimes it hurts a bit, and that's not something that women are used to. I think it's easier for boys. I don't know, but maybe they are able to handle pain better, and they don't get hurt so easily compared to women (Liina, FI).

The female biological inferiority discourse is also employed to constrain women and girls from practicing or competing in judo. For example, supporting findings reported by Xanthi (2013), many of the participants in this study reported that their mothers were skeptical of their sporting endeavors, as they thought of judo as a dangerous sport for girls:

My mother did not want me to start judo. She was afraid that I will get hurt...that someone will hurt me. But my father really liked it and he wanted me to go (Elpida, GR).

Drawing on Foucauldian theorizing, critical scholars of sport sociology have problematized the ways that female bodies have been *objectified*<sup>12</sup> as frail and fragile, and consequently, how sports that require tolerance to pain are constructed as masculine (Markula & Pringle, 2006; Pringle, 2014). Becoming *subjectified*<sup>13</sup> to this scientific "truth," women get tied to specific ways of thinking about themselves and others, and actively reproduce existing gender hierarchies (Markula & Pringle, 2006). Hence, the discourse of female biological inferiority structures the practices and strategies employed by judo clubs (or by fe-

<sup>12</sup> The process of objectification refers to individuals becoming objects, e.g., under the scientific gaze who looks at bodies as anatomical machines (Markula & Pringle, 2006)

<sup>13</sup> The process of subjectification refers to the multiple ways in which humans get tied to particular identities and to ways of being "known" or categorized, and thereby thinking and acting about themselves (Markula & Pringle, 2006; Thorpe, 2008).

male judoka themselves), even when these practices are supposed to be aimed at supporting women:

We have discussed about arranging a course for women, but we haven't just made it happen yet. Or we have discussed, what if we advertise that this (class) is for self-defense and not for sport? Would then more women be interested in it (Heli, FI)?

Versions of this discourse also have been detected in other MACS (Matthews, 2014, 2016; McGannon et al., 2018) and sport contexts (Markula & Pringle, 2006; Milner & Braddock, 2016; Wood & Garn, 2016), as well as in male-dominated fields, such as farming (Stoneman & Jinnah, 2015), the armed forces (Barret, 1996; Vaara, Viskari, Kyröläinen, & Santtila, 2016), religion, and politics (Walsh, 2001). Like the judoka who participated in this study, women in the aforementioned fields also have been found to reproduce existing masculinist ideologies and normative discourses of female biological inferiority (Vaara et al., 2016; Walsh, 2001). This is often understood as a (conscious or unconscious) strategy that women use to become accepted, respected, and appreciated in these male-dominated fields and to advance their careers (Walsh, 2001).

As previously argued by Channon (2013a, 2013b, 2014) and manifested by the data below, women's participation in MACS offers the possibility of challenging the discourse of female biological inferiority:

The last half an hour of the training, we did some kind of circuit training for strength and endurance. We had to make pairs, and we were kind of competing against the other pairs. The guys paired up with each other, and I paired up with Elina. I got a 12 kg kettlebell and Elina got a 10kg one. In the first round, Elina and I beat all the guys. In the second round, we finished second. We had to do four rounds altogether. When we finished, I just lied on the mat, totally exhausted, but happy. The coach came to say that we did a good job. I think I had a big smile in my face (Research log 5.11.2013, training session in FI1).

We have (name of female athlete), who is the best competitor in Finland. This is nice because we have these old judo guys who are coaching now, and they think that men rule the world. It's so nice to be able to show them that this is not the case (Eliisa, FI).

However, despite the multiple possibilities for empowerment and transformation, the present study revealed that the discourse of female biological inferiority is so deeply embedded in the structures of our sporting cultures (and our societies in general) that it is difficult to tackle. The increased numbers of women participating in MACS do not guarantee change when women themselves often accept and reproduce dominant beliefs about the frailty of the female body (even when our own experiences contradict these masculinist assumptions about what the female body can and cannot do). However, women are definitely not to blame for their subjectification to this "scientific" discourse that has been circulated for ages by powerful institutions such as the media, the family, and religion, and has been reinforced by school teachers and medical doctors (Vertinsky, 1994; Weedon, 1997).

In sport cultures, the discourse of female biological inferiority has been found to be even more resilient than in other contexts, and it is frequently em-

ployed to justify sex segregation; differential rules, prizes, and salaries; and other forms of discrimination (Milner & Braddock, 2016; Wood & Garn, 2016). For example, while segregation would be illegal in many other contexts – e.g., imagine sex-segregated math classes based on the stereotype that men are better in math, or can you imagine race-segregated sports based on the belief that people of color are physically superior? Gender segregation continues to prevail in sport and physical education. Justified by the discourse of female biological inferiority, the ways that sports are organized and operated create gendered hierarchies, as well as formal and informal norms of exclusion (Milner & Braddock, 2016; Wood & Garn, 2016). Revising and subverting this discourse is essential for achieving gender equity in judo (as well as in other contexts perceived as “naturally” male).

### 5.1.2 Discourses of ideal femininity

While the discourse of female biological inferiority was dominant in both Greece and Finland, multiple discourses of femininity were found to be circulated in the two countries, some more powerful than others. Ideal femininity was constructed differently in Greece and in Finland and the ways that different judoka positioned themselves in relation to these ideals varied.

In Greece, the ideal feminine body was constructed as fit, thin, and sexy – attractive (and attracted) to the opposite sex (Markula, 1995; McGannon & Spence, 2012). Greek judoka (especially the younger ones) were found to be subjectified to this traditional view of ideal femininity. Several complexities arise from this subjectification, as the social expectations associated with this version of ideal femininity contrast with those associated with athleticism (Krane et al., 2004). Krane et al. (2004) named this phenomenon the *female vs. athlete paradox*. This lived paradox was visible in the accounts provided by young female Greek judoka, who framed femininity and muscularity as incompatible:

When you do too much weight training, your body starts becoming more like...more like male (Alexandra, GR).

I don't lift that many weights to become too muscular, but neither am I not lifting at all. I am lifting moderately in order to have a nice body and look and act like a girl (Eleftheria, GR).

“Acting like a girl” was framed as important in order to “appear” in accordance with the norms of ideal femininity (Butler, 1990). Within this framework, being a feminine woman requires not only looking, but also behaving, talking, and acting in accordance with certain social standards:

Regarding the physical characteristics of a woman, such as breasts, you cannot do much. If a woman does not have breasts, she certainly is not pretty, but you cannot do much about that. But regarding the way she talks, the way she behaves, the way she walks, the way she does her hair, or the way she moves all these, I think, relate to femininity. For instance, a female judoka that I know and comes to mind, I think she does not look feminine, and I think that men would not like this (Eva, GR).



My first boyfriend was into judo, and he could understand me more. He was telling me that judo is good, and I should continue training, but I should also try to act like a girl. And since I was able to balance both (being an athlete and being a girl), he had no problem (Eleftheria, GR).

By subjecting themselves to this masculinist and sexist way of evaluating a woman's worth, young female judoka not only disciplined their bodies to the norms of ideal femininity, but also constructed those who failed or refused to comply with these norms as lower in the hierarchy. Women who had succeeded as athletes, but had "failed" to pass as feminine women, were not seen as worthy of admiration. Instead, the path to social recognition was viewed as being able to combine athletic achievements with beauty and femininity standards.

However, older female athletes in Greece, even though they also were aware that judo (and the body produced by it) is at odds with the norms of ideal femininity, seemed to be comfortable with their bodies and had accepted the social costs that came with it:

Because you have chosen this particular sport, you might acquire specific characteristics. When you are an athlete that fights, you cannot be the ethereal creature that moves like dancing. You might acquire a specific athletic-type posture, and men usually do not like that in a woman. They prefer something more airy (Melina, GR).

Rejecting the body that is imposed on us by dominant discourses of ideal femininity can be an act of resistance when it is allied with a critique, e.g., of the ways that attractive, heterosexual female athletes are privileged in the media (Markula & Pringle, 2006; Thorpe, 2008). Yet, such a critique was somewhat lacking from the accounts of the female Greek judoka.

Finnish judoka did not talk about femininity as much as Greek judoka did. When Finns talked about it, femininity was not constructed as something at odds with being a judo athlete. The athletic and muscular body was framed as beautiful and feminine:

I think that sports is always good for women because it builds up the muscles, it keeps you fit, your posture is better than the posture of other women who don't do sports, and you actually look better. Well...OK...in judo, you don't have to look beautiful, like in ice skating or gymnastics. Those are the ones that are aesthetic sports. But in judo, you build up muscles and because it's a weight-class sport, usually you cannot be fat. It's usually muscles that you have, so I think that's one thing that's good for you, regarding how you look and how you appear to the outside (Sara, FI).

Channon and Phipps (2017) argued that notions of femininity that frame the feminine woman as encompassing strength and power can work against inherent gender hierarchies in MACS. Indeed, Finnish judoka valued those women who did powerful things and saw judo as a means of gaining social recognition. While certain femininity rituals were constructed as somehow incompatible with judo (not for social, but for practical reasons), this collision was viewed as a small sacrifice while becoming a worthy athlete and person:

In high school, many girls did some makeup and things like that, but I never had time to do that, or to put on some jewelry. I have training in the morning and then I have to hurry to school and my hair is wet and I just put it like this (she shows how she does her hair), but really, I don't mind. I like it this way (Liina, FI).

The version of ideal femininity circulated in Finland offers more acceptance and inclusion for female athletes who engage in so-called masculine sports, as it celebrates the intersection of femininity with strength and physicality (McGannon et al., 2018). Also, compared to the rigid ideals of femininity circulated in Greece, the Finnish version of ideal femininity is characterized by fluidity, offering greater acceptance of different bodies and identity performances. Yet, bodies and identity performances in Finland (and in Finnish judo) are not totally free from social norms and expectations. The feminine is still constructed as the natural consequence of being born female (and the masculine of being born male) and acceptable ways of behaving, dressing etc. are still tied to this gender binary:

After the fight, the boys take the upper part of their gi off. They walk around showing off their naked upper body. One of them has big and developed muscles. They almost look unnatural in his short and young body. Another young guy approaches him; he starts checking him out by touching his abs. The girls immediately fix their hair when they leave the fight. Some girls also take the upper part of their gi off too; they are wearing tight, white T-shirts underneath (Research log 12.10.2013).

### 5.1.3 Patriarchal discourse vs. gender equality discourse

Differences also were observed in the ways in which Greek and Finnish judoka positioned themselves in relation to the gender roles and expectations circulated in judo realms and in the general societal context. Greek judoka were subjected to the dominant patriarchal understandings of gender roles that are circulated in the Greek societal context. Within the patriarchal discourse of gender roles, men and women are expected to behave differently and to take up different tasks, roles, and even professions and sports. This discourse is linked to the discursive construction of sex as a biological fact and to the discourse of female biological inferiority, as well as to traditional understandings of masculinity and femininity. All these discourses work together in perpetuating male privilege in the organization of society (Weedon, 1997).

Within the patriarchal discourse of gender roles, the role of the caregiver is prescribed to women, while men have the role of the provider and dominate leadership roles (Hochschild & Machung, 2003; McGannon & Schinke, 2013; Weedon, 1997). This discourse is structural and difficult to tackle, as it is perpetuated by powerful institutions, such as work and family (Foucault, 1978; Hochschild & Machung, 2003; Weedon, 1997). Through the family, Greek girls are socialized into traditional gender roles and are brought up to become women who accept and reproduce the patriarchal relations of power:

What I have as a figure is this here (my family). This is what I have accepted. This is what I like. I do not want someone who is lying down and doing nothing, but I cannot stand a man in an apron and doing household chores. Meaning, it looks bad to

me. I don't like it. And this has to do with what I was seeing as a child. Let's say, my father never did such things, ever. Neither my brothers. They still do not (Anastasia, GR).

Man is the head of the family, but woman is the neck, and she turns the head wherever she wants. This is what our grandmas taught us (Elpida, GR).

The patriarchal discourse of gender roles is also circulated in the Greek judo context, in which men hold the positions of power (as manifested by the current executive committee of the Hellenic Judo Federation). Confirming the problems reported by Chroni et al. (2013), as well as by Xanthi (2013), the female Greek athletes who participated in this study reported that they have been deprived of opportunities because of their gender:

You have passion and love for what you are doing, and there are some people who are restricting you and block your way because you are a woman. For example, when I asked why I hadn't been promoted to international tournaments (like male athletes had) since I am a national champion, an official from the federation told me that I was too old. And when male athletes of the same age I was were sent abroad, I was told that this is the best age for male athletes. So, according to them, as a woman, I should have already quit at the age of 28, while 28-year-old male athletes are at the peak age (Melina, GR).

In Finland, this discourse is being opposed by the circulation of a gender equality discourse, according to which men and women should have equal access to resources and opportunities and should be able to develop their abilities and make choices regardless of their gender. Gender equality is a policy discourse that is proudly circulated in Finland, a country that is often viewed as a pioneer in gender equality (Brunila & Ylöstalo, 2015). In the Finnish judo context, the gender equality discourse manifests itself in the current organization of the Finnish Judo Association, as well as in the ways in which female Finnish judoka describe the Finnish judo scene as a field characterized by equality:

I think it's actually the equality that I liked (in judo) (Sara, FI).

I think it's quite equal for males and females (in Finnish judo) (Eliisa, FI).

As a woman judo athlete, I feel that in Finland the situation is much better for me than it would be in some other countries (Martta, FI).

However, feminist researchers argue that the uncritical circulation of this discourse can create new complications. First, it makes gender inequalities appear to be a problem that already has been solved (Brunila & Ylöstalo, 2015; Hyvärinen, 2017; Larsson, 2014). Second, women are now expected to be superwomen, able to achieve in multiple roles and to perform multiple shifts of labor (Hochschild & Machung, 2003). Supporting the concerns raised by feminist researchers, the data gathered in Finland reveal the tensions that female Finnish judoka experience in their efforts to succeed not only in judo, but also in their academic and work-related pursuits:

When I started this school I am in now, it was a really stressful time because I had so much to do. I wanted to graduate in two years, and do the training, so I woke up like...before 5 o'clock to train, and then school and then training again, and I couldn't sleep. It was a really stressful time (Elli, FI).

I was 28 when I decided to quit competing in judo. It wasn't because I thought that I was too old, neither because of injuries. I just thought that I had enough of that. Maybe I was too tired, because in Finland it's not that easy to be only athlete. I had a few years that I was able to concentrate only in judo and those were nice years. But most of the time I had to study or work in the same time. I had a hectic schedule every day and all the time I was running to somewhere. I think I had enough of that (Piia, FI).

Finnish women are brought up to become strong and independent, and they are expected to succeed in all areas of life (e.g. in sport, education, and career). Yet, at the same time, Finnish women have not exactly escaped from gender roles and expectations:

My mom always asks me when am I going to grow up and start having children. So...she disapproves of judo. She has never approved of my sports (Sara, FI).

Sometimes they (my parents) ask me when am I going to quit judo and start having a family (Martta, FI).

These contradictions are also apparent in the Finnish judo context. Despite equality-orientated strategies implemented by the federation and by clubs, different roles and tasks are still assigned to men and women. For example, more men than women are involved in decision making, while women are more likely to take up secretarial roles (e.g., Larsson, 2014). Competitive teams are usually coached by men, while women are more likely to coach children or beginner sessions. Moreover, women often end up doing various "chores" for their clubs to become accepted and appreciated:

Most of the coaches, of course, they are always men (Eliisa, FI).

Coaching cadets is OK, but with adults...sometimes I feel that it's difficult to instruct the men. Because, I just started as a coach and I have a feeling that...many men don't appreciate the women's results as much as the men's. So, I feel that there is a gap that I cannot pass. I cannot go to men and correct their techniques (Piia, FI).

I go and sit with the audience. Not many people are watching the competition, and most of the people there are parents of the competitors. The audience is mainly quiet. Sometimes, you can hear a male voice shouting. It is either a father, or a coach. I cannot hear any female voices shouting (Research log 12.10.2013, judo tournament in Finland).

I entered the dojo. The children were just about to finish their training. Elina was their instructor. As I was waiting for our training to start, I asked the head coach if he could tell me who is handling the finances of the club now and to whom should I talk about my training fees. He said that Heli is taking care of these issues now (Research log 5.11.2013, training session in FI).

#### 5.1.4 Discourses on sports: athletic performance, elite sports, and mass sports

The experiences and identities of female judoka are influenced by dominant discourses that constitute what it means to be an athlete. These discourses (like all discourses) are characterized by cultural and historical specificity; thus, differences were found in the ways that they manifest themselves in Greece and Finland. In Greece, a discourse of athletic performance was heavily circulated in judo clubs, shaping athletes' experiences and identity negotiation. The core rationality of this discourse is that to count as an athlete, one needs to meet certain performance expectations. In this framework, winning is emphasized, and many disciplining practices (e.g., training, dieting, etc.) are orientated toward achieving this goal (Cosh et al., 2012; Markula & Pringle, 2006). This discourse was often employed by male coaches in Greece:

Coach was talking a lot about an upcoming competition today. He said that he wants us to compete only if we are serious about it and not just for the participation. He said that he doesn't want losers on his team (Research log 22.2.2011, training session in GR1).

While watching the competition, I was really disturbed by an incident between a young female athlete and her male coach. The athlete had just lost her fight and was sitting on a bench crying. The coach was shouting at her, "Next time, tell your daddy to take you to competitions because I didn't bring you here to lose. You are embarrassing me and yourself. You are stupid." It was even more disturbing that this event was taking place in a "women-only tournament" ... a tournament that was organized with the intention to empower young female judoka (Research log 13.3.2011, women-only tournament in Greece).

Female coaches, on the other hand, were more concerned about athletes' well-being:

17 athletes were training today, among them seven females. Everybody was preparing for the upcoming women-only tournament. [Name of female coach], the coach of the team, has been the main organizer of this tournament. So, today's training was more focused on the preparation of the girls and young women that will compete, while the boys were working on some kind of judo choreography, consisting of judo techniques mixed with acrobatics and dance. They will perform this choreography at the women-only tournament. The coach was saying to the female athletes that they should not skip any training before the competition. She said, "I don't care that much if you are going to win or lose, but you might get injured if you haven't been training" (Research log 8.3.2011, training session in GR2).

The discourse of athletic performance also was circulated in the Finnish judo clubs, linked to an elite sport discourse (e.g., Ronkainen, Ryba, & Nesti, 2013). Within this combination of discourses, elite sports are constructed as "serious sports" and different from mass sports. People can participate in mass sports for different reasons, in different frequencies and intensities. However, when it comes to elite sports, winning becomes the ultimate goal, and the only way to achieve this goal is dedication and hard work:

You can train in judo, that's OK, but competing is just so much harder. You need to put yourself on the edge, and you need to go beyond your comfort zone, and, of course, losing weight, and it's not always fun (Liina, FI).

Values such as enjoyment, equality, and well-being are associated with mass sport culture, while winning and athletic performance are the values circulated within the elite sport culture. Moreover, while mass sports are for everyone, elite sports are geared more toward younger athletes:

If I am still OK and nothing bad happens, and I get enough points to be able to fight in Rio, I will be happy to represent Finland....and then I am done....because I am old (Sara, FI).

There is a tournament going on in our city today. I came to watch. One young guy from my club is standing in front of the door. "Why are you not competing?" he asks. "I am too old for that" I reply. "No!" he says. "And I haven't been training much" I add (Research log 12.10.2013, judo tournament in Finland).

At Finnish judo clubs, elite and recreational athletes often train together. Despite the empowering possibilities offered within these inclusive "training together" practices (see Publication IV), the simultaneous circulation of two antagonistic discourses (i.e., elite sport discourse and mass sport discourse) can also create confusion, hierarchies, and certain forms of exclusion:

After the warming up and uchikomi exercises, the head coach said that we will do some endurance training for the competitors. "Whoever is not competing and does not want to do it, does not have to," the coach added. Nobody said they do not want to do it. The head coach said "Great," and he told us to divide into groups of three. Me, Heli, and Elina became one group. The guys made groups of three too, but this new woman with the white belt was left alone. She was standing alone on the side of the mats. The head coach approached her. Probably, he told her that she can stretch for a while because she started doing some stretching-like movements. She stayed there, stretching and observing us during the whole exercise that lasted 15-20 minutes (Research log 4.12.2013, training session in FI1).

## 5.2 Deconstructing identity

From a feminist poststructuralist and cultural praxis perspective, the ways in which female athletes make sense of themselves depend on the availability of discourses in their socio-cultural contexts (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978; McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Ryba & Wright, 2010; Weedon, 1997). Limited discursive resources equal limited possibilities for thinking, feeling, and behaving (Markula & Pringle, 2006; McGannon & Johnson, 2009). In turn, when the available discourses are contradictory and antagonistic, female athletes might find themselves performing shifting and often conflicting identities (Butler, 1993; Weedon, 1997).

Findings from the present study suggest that drawing on the aforementioned discursive resources, female judoka strategically construct multiple (and often conflicting) identities, each serving different purposes (see Publications II



and III). These identities are the site of discursive struggle, as they sometimes resist dominant power dynamics, while other times, they reproduce them (Weedon, 1997).

While I would never be able to account for all the identities performed by the participants of this study, my agenda led me to focus on revealing the multiple ways in which we (strategically and/or subconsciously) participate in the reproduction of gender hierarchies and stereotypes through the ways in which we talk about ourselves and others and through the ways in which we perform our identities. Below, I de-construct the *successful and feminine athlete* and the *natural-born fighter* to show the mechanisms through which these identities assist in the reproduction of gender hierarchies and inequalities.

### 5.2.1 Successful and feminine athlete

It is well-documented in the literature that female athletes who manage to succeed in sport while maintaining hegemonic/ideal femininity enjoy more appreciation (i.e., more media attention, sponsorships, etc.) than athletes who cannot (or do not want to) keep up with the dominant ideals of femininity in their respective cultures (Krane et al., 2004; Thorpe, 2008). The discursive construction of ideal femininity as an essential quality for judging women divides female athletes into different categories or subject positions (i.e., the butch athlete, the tomboy, etc.), with the *successful and feminine athlete* being higher in the hierarchy. The *successful and feminine athlete* is privileged and reinforced by sports media, who tend to focus more on physical attractiveness than on athletic achievements when talking about female athletes (Pirinen, 2006; Thorpe, 2008). Being caught in such networks of power, female athletes often take up the successful and feminine athlete identity as a strategy for gaining acceptance and recognition:

I think it's very sexy for a woman to participate actively in a sport and at the same time to be able to maintain her femininity visible to the world. Because, truth be told, if a woman loses her femininity, she ceases to be a woman, and this looks very ugly, especially to the male population (Eva, FI).

Adopting this subject position has certain implications for female judoka's subjectivities. For example, in Greece "being feminine" means keeping up with rigid ideals of femininity that require women's bodies to be of a particular size and shape (Krane et al., 2004). Trying to keep up with these ideals (that are often at odds with physicality), female athletes might experience distress in relation to their sport bodies (McGannon & Johnson, 2009). In turn, they might start policing their behavior, e.g., by undertaking certain diets and training regimes, while avoiding others. Performing this identity can be particularly unhealthy (and can have negative consequences for performance) in judo, a sport that requires athletes to develop strength and physicality while maintaining a certain weight category. However, changing this way of thinking, feeling, and behaving is difficult when the representation of female athletes (and women in general) in the

mass media typically promotes dominant discourses of ideal femininity (Markula, 1995).

While it is possible to perform a feminine athlete identity in reflexive, agentic, and critical ways (Channon & Phipps, 2017; Markula & Pringle, 2006; Thorpe, 2008), female athletes need to be aware of the power dynamics that are perpetuated when they decide to emphasize their looks rather than their skills. Even when femininity is emphasized as a strategy to transform and empower the self, it does not transform the masculinist and sexist way of evaluating women.

### 5.2.2 Natural-born fighter

Within the discourse of female biological inferiority, women are constructed as “soft” -- passive, fragile, unable to tolerate pain and demanding physical activity, such as fighting and competition (Menesson, 2000; Vertinsky, 1994). Female judoka in Greece and Finland heavily drew on this “scientific” discourse when talking about “ordinary” women:

I don't know why these other girls didn't like it (judo). I don't know how to explain it. They were soft. I think it was that. Because in judo, all the time someone is throwing you or hitting you or something, and some girls don't like that (Elli, FI).

However, female judoka did not identify with the characteristics of the soft and fragile woman when talking about themselves. Instead, when talking about their sporting experiences, they said they always liked competition, and during their judo careers, they were able to endure pain and overcome serious injuries:

When I was an orange belt, I was already so hooked that I wouldn't have stopped if somebody had ordered me. And I had some injuries in the beginning. I broke my ligament in the knee. The doctor said that “maybe you shouldn't do this anymore...your knee is unstable now” and I just started crying because it was so awful, the thought that I had to stop. Judo was my social place; my best friends were there. I wanted to be with the judo people, and I loved the competitions. I still remember my first competition...it was something very special. I kind of forgot everything else in the world, and it was only the fight...to stand or fall. I had never experienced something like that before (Jenni, FI).

By performing the identity of the “natural-born fighter” (i.e., an exceptional being born with masculine qualities, such as competitiveness, tolerance to pain, and the ability to fight), female judoka differentiated themselves from “ordinary” women:

I was always a tomboy. I liked to wrestle, and in school, I was always fighting with boys and girls. I was not made for ballet and stuff like that (Sotiria, GR).

Although this “natural-born fighter” identity may be empowering for female judoka (allowing them to justify their position in judo, to gain a sense of superiority over other women, and to become accepted in the male domain of martial arts), it also assists in reproducing the belief that fighting and competitiveness are innate male qualities and that judo is a manly sport of which few women

are capable. Thus, performing this identity becomes a means of reproducing the belief that “ordinary women cannot do this,” contributing to the politics of exclusion (Hall, 1996) that operate in MACS. Yet again, changing this way of thinking is difficult when beliefs about the frailty of the female body are discursively constructed as the scientific truth.

## 6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this doctoral research, I mapped the discourses circulated in the Finnish and Greek judo cultures, and I explored how female judoka negotiate their identities by drawing on these discursive resources. A *female biological inferiority discourse*, *discourses of ideal femininity*, a *patriarchal discourse of gender roles*, a *discourse of gender equality*, and *discourses of athletic performance and elite and mass sports* were found to be linked to the multiple (and often conflicting) identities performed by female judoka. Certain identities, such as the *successful and feminine athlete* and the *natural-born fighter*, were found to be repeatedly performed, reifying the gender hierarchies imposed on us by dominant discourses of ideal femininity and female biological inferiority.

### 6.1 Theoretical implications

With this doctoral study, I sought to respond to calls from feminists and cultural scholars of sport psychology to (re)examine female athletes' identities and shed light on how gender inequalities in sport are reproduced (Krane, 1994; McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Ryba & Write, 2010). Before this study, very few scholars in sport psychology conceptualized athletes' identities as discursively constructed (e.g., Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2015, 2016). Moreover, the topic of gender identities in judo was suspiciously absent from the literature (with the exception of Guerandel and Mennesson, 2007, who studied gender interactions).

This is the first study to explore the identities of female judoka in Greece and Finland, and the first of its kind (in sport psychology) in terms of theoretical and methodological design. The combination of feminist poststructuralist and cultural praxis frameworks allowed for exploring cultural similarities and differences in a culturally sensitive and reflexive way (i.e., contextualizing differences as fluid and shifting, caused by the circulation of multiple and antagonistic discourses, rather than reifying cultural stereotypes). In terms of method-

ology, the combination of ethnography and discourse analysis allowed for attending to the complexities of gender hierarchies and inequalities by exploring how these are manifested and discursively (re)produced in different judo communities. Finally, this study illustrated the potential of feminist poststructuralist and Foucauldian theory for revealing and challenging the taken-for-granted knowledges that are circulated in our sport cultures and practices.

## 6.2 Practical implications

These findings have important implications for those interested in promoting gender equality in judo (and in other contexts typically viewed as male). First, this study reveals that the increased presence of women alone is not always enough to challenge sexist and masculinist ideologies that dominate sport cultures. Female athletes, regardless of how many, often end up reproducing patriarchal gender hierarchies and understandings through the language they use, the practices in which they engage, and the identities they perform. Thus, future interventions should not just focus on enhancing the numbers of women and girls doing judo; they should also target the deconstruction of gender stereotypes. This could be done for example, through creating opportunities for education and open discussion for all those involved (coaches, athletes, parents, etc.), and through reflecting on the ways that certain practices, values, or beliefs might be linked to the exclusion or marginalization of some athletes (McGannon et al., 2018).

Second, this study shows how cultural (and national) contexts shape women's struggles in male dominated sports, as well as the strategies that female athletes use to further their careers. The circulation of gender-equality values and the existence of related legislation and policies can (to some degree) prevent gender discrimination from occurring. Yet, changes in the desired direction of gender equality cannot be guaranteed through legislation and policies alone, when masculinist and sexist discourses continue to be circulated by powerful institutions, such as the sport system, mass media, the family, and so on.

From a feminist poststructuralist point of view, change is possible when female athletes learn to recognize the different gender discourses in circulation, and to resist what is offered to them in dominant oppressive discourses (Markula & Pringle, 2006; McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Weedon, 1997). For example, female athletes can resist the discourses outlined above (e.g., discourses of ideal femininity and female biological inferiority) by drawing upon alternative discourses in which muscularity is not seen as incompatible with femininity, and womanhood is not seen as incompatible with fighting and competition. Coaches, sport psychologists, and parents can also draw on these alternative discourses and employ non-gendered language and practices when interacting with female athletes. It is, moreover, important that female athletes draw on these alternative discourses when making sense of their identities and when

talking to news media, posting online information about themselves on social media, or interacting with other female athletes (McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Thorpe, 2008). By policing their identities in ways that contribute to gender equality instead of reproducing the existing gender order, female athletes can become agents of change.

### 6.3 Limitations and recommendations for future research

Feminist researchers have long acknowledged the methodological, theoretical, and political complexities of their work, as well as the subjective nature of their interpretations (e.g., Haraway, 1988; Olive & Thorpe, 2018). Adhering to this view, I am aware that the conclusions I have reached are informed by my individual theoretical and political positions, as well as by my personal experiences in judo. I also am aware that these positions, as well as how I made sense of my experiences and the data that I gathered, shifted during this research. Thus, the process was neither smooth, nor flawless, but long, messy, and frustrating.

As I immersed myself into the theory, I became alarmed at my feminist and research failures (Olive & Thorpe, 2018). For example, it is painful to listen to the very first interviews that I conducted. There were more than a few occasions in these first interviews when I not only failed to ask critical questions (besides the ones planned in my interview guide), but I, myself, also reproduced stereotypes on gender and sexuality by assuming, for example, that the athletes were heterosexual. Some of the interviews were rather short (20-25 minutes) because of my inexperience as an interviewer. Others were short because they were conducted in training camps and competition arenas within limited time frames. Conducting the Finnish interviews in English (which is neither my nor the participants' mother tongue) also might have been a factor.

My participant-observation similarly was limited by a lack of resources and language barriers. Originally, I planned to observe and train with two teams in each country for four months on each team. However, a lack of funding made completion of this plan impossible. I ended up studying two teams in Greece and one in Finland, and I stayed with each team, in each country, as long as I could afford to do so financially.

It is also painful to read some of my first texts. At times, I feel that I have misused (or not used at all) certain of the poststructuralist concepts, and that if I could revisit the original publications, I might have theorized some of the phenomena differently. Moreover, the experiences and identities that I have explored in this study are limited to those of female judoka in Greece and Finland, and particularly to those of the women that I interviewed. Future research should examine the experiences and identities of female judoka in other countries. In addition, future research should look at the experiences of other gender and sexual minorities in judo, as it is well-documented that they are marginalized and discriminated against in our sporting cultures (Caudwell, 2006; Kokkonen 2014; Krane et al., 2010). Furthermore, we still know very little about



how gender inequalities in MACS intersect with racial, ethnic, religious, and other discourses and identities. Since our world today is characterized by mobility (and crisis), future research should examine these intersections. Once the mechanisms through which gender inequalities are reproduced are better understood, we should shift the focus onto identifying strategies that might prove more effective in disrupting and challenging them. Moving into praxis, blending research with feminist and activist work, and employing discursive interventions are possible strategies for troubling the gender order. As Butler (1990) argued, since trouble is inevitable, the task for the future is to find the best ways to make it.

## FINNISH SUMMARY / YHTEENVETO

### “Menestyvä ja naisellinen urheilija” ja “synnynnäinen taistelija”: Diskurssiivinen tutkimus naisjudokoiden identiteetistä Kreikassa ja Suomessa”

Tämä väitöstutkimukseni keskittyi kreikkalaisten ja suomalaisten naisjudokoiden identiteettineuvotteluihin. Tukeuduin kulttuuristen käytäntöjen ja feministisen poststruktuurallisen tutkimuksen viitekehykseen tutkiessani sukupuolen, kulttuurin ja identiteetin intersektionaalisuutta judossa. Tutkimukseni tarkoitus oli selvittää, millä tavoin kulttuurinen konteksti muokkaa naisjudokoiden kokemuksia ja identiteettejä. Tavoitteenani oli 1) tutkia niitä diskursseja, joiden kautta naisjudokat ilmaisevat ja järjeistävät kokemuksiaan sekä 2) kehittää teoriaan perustuvaa analyttistä ymmärrystä siitä, kuinka naisjudokat muodostavat identiteettejään sosiokulttuuristen uskomusten ja sukupuolistereotyyppien neuvotteluiden kautta. Käytin tutkimuksessa etnografista lähestymistapaa. Tutkimusaineistoni keräsin Kreikassa ja Suomessa. Osallistuvan havainnoimisen lisäksi keräsin 19 naisjudokan haastatteluaineiston, joka koostui kymmenen kreikkalaisen, iältään 17 - 40-vuotiaan naisjudokan ja yhdeksän suomalaisen, iältään 20 - 49-vuotiaan naisjudokan puolistrukturoiduista haastatteluista.

Löysin useita kulttuurissa vaikuttavia diskursseja, jotka antavat naisjudokolle malleja järjeistää ja ymmärtää itseään ja kokemuksiaan. Nämä diskurssit ovat: *naisen biologisen huononmuuden diskurssi, ihanteellisen naisellisuuden diskurssi, sukupuoliroolin patriarkaalinen diskurssi, sukupuolten välisen tasa-arvon diskurssi, urheilusuorituksen diskurssi, huippu-urheilun ja kansanurheilun diskurssi*. Näiden diskurssien sisällä naisjudokat muodostivat useita (ja usein ristiriitaisia) identiteettejä, joista jokainen palveli eri tarkoitusta.

Jotkut identiteetit, kuten *menestyvä ja naisellinen urheilija* ja *synnynnäinen taistelija* olivat toisia yleisempiä. *Menestyvän ja naisellisen urheilijan* identiteetti oli hallitseva nuorilla kreikkalaisilla naisjudokoilla, jotka yrittivät tulla hyväksytyiksi niin judon mieskulttuurissa kuin kreikkalaisessa, patriarkalisessa yhteiskunnassa.

Tämä identiteetti oli yhteydessä ihanteellisen naisellisuuden diskurssiiviseen rakentamiseen välttämättömänä ominaisuutena arvioitaessa naisten arvoa. Kreikassa “olla naisellinen” käsitettiin samaksi kuin olla hoikka, seksikäs ja viehättävä vastakkaisen sukupuolen silmissä (ja olla viehätynyt vastakkaisesta sukupuolesta). Naiset, jotka olivat menestyneet urheilijoina, mutta jotka olivat “epäonnistuneet” olemaan naisellisia naisia, konstruoitiin vähemmän ihailun arvoisiksi. Urheilullinen menestys ja naisellisuus tuli ilmetä samassa judokassa, jotta ihailu urheilijaa kohtaan säilyi. Nuoret naisjudokat kokivat urheilullisuuden ja naisellisuuden vaateen ristiriitaisena.

Kreikkaan verrattuna Suomessa naisellisuutta ei koettu ristiriitaisena voimalle ja fyysisyydelle suomalaisessa ideaalissa naisellisuudesta, mikä tarjosi enemmän hyväksyntää ja sisäänpääsyn kokemuksia judokoilta. Lisäksi suomalaiset naisjudokat arvostivat niitä naisia, jotka tekivät “kovia juttuja” ja pitivät judoa keinona saada sosiaalista hyväksyntää.

*Synnyynnäisen taistelijan* identiteettiä rakensivat kaikenikäiset naisjudokat molemmissa maissa. Tämä identiteetti liittyi naisen biologisen huonommuuden diskurssiin ja uskomuksiin siitä, että tavalliset naiset ovat pehmeitä, passiivisia, hauraita ja sopimattomia kilpailemaan judossa. Erottaakseen itsensä tästä stereotyyppisestä naiskuvasta, naisjudokat konstruivat itsensä poikkeusyksilöiksi, joilla on synnyynnäisesti miehekkäitä ominaisuuksia, kuten kilpailullisuus, kivunsietokyky ja kyky taistella. Tällä tavalla naisjudokat uusinsivat uskomusta siitä, että judo on luonnostaan miesten urheilulaji, jota suurin osa naisista ei voi harrastaa. Vaikka *menestyvän ja naisellisen urheilijan* ja *synnyynnäisen taistelijan* identiteetit saattoivat voimaannuttaa naisjudokoita – ehkä ollen jopa strategia keinoja tulla hyväksytyiksi ja arvostetuiksi judon miehisessä kulttuurissa – näiden identiteettien toistaminen vahvisti sukupuolihierarkioita ja epätasa-arvoa.

Tutkimukseni paljasti, että pelkkä naisten lisääntyvä osallistuminen tai näkyvämpi läsnäolo urheilulajeissa ei aina riitä haastamaan urheilua hallitsevia seksistisiä ja miehisiiä ideologioita. Riippumatta naisurheilijoiden määrästä, naisurheilijat päätyvät usein tuottamaan uudestaan patriarkaalisia sukupuolihierarkioita ja järjeistämisen käytäntöjä kielenkäyttönsä, käytänteidensä ja identiteettiensä kautta. Toiseksi lainsäädäntö ja politiikka eivät takaa toivottuja muutoksia sukupuolten väliseen tasa-arvoon, jos vaikutusvaltaiset instituutiot, kuten esimerkiksi tiedotusvälineet, perhe ja huippu-urheilu, jatkossakin levittävät miehisiiä ja seksistisiä diskursseja. Näin ollen väitöskirjatyöni löydökset ovat tärkeitä kehitettäessä välineitä sukupuolten välisen tasa-arvon lisäämiseksi urheilussa ja muussa yhteiskunnassa.

Vaihtoehtoisten diskurssien tietoinen rakentaminen ja ylläpito olisi tärkeää sukupuolihierarkioiden pienentämiseksi ja sukupuolten välisen tasa-arvon lisäämiseksi. Naisurheilijoiden on mahdollista voimaantua ja edistää kulttuurista muutosta vain haastamalla aiempia diskursseja uusilla, joissa naiseutta ei nähdä taistelulle vastakkaisena. Myös valmentajien, urheilupsykologien ja vanhempien olisi tärkeä osoittaa tukensa vanhoja diskursseja haastaville diskursseille muun muassa välttämällä sukupuolittunutta kieltä ja käytäntöjä toimissaan naisurheilijoiden kanssa. Lisäksi on tärkeää, että naisurheilijat tulevat itse tietoisiksi uusintamistaan (tai vastustamistaan) valtasuhteista puhuessaan lehdistölle, tehdessään itsestään postauksia sosiaalisessa mediassa tai toimiessaan muiden naisurheilijoiden kanssa. Kehittäessään identiteettejään sellaisilla tavoilla, jotka edistävät sukupuolten välistä tasa-arvoa sen sijaan, että uusintaisivat olemassa olevaa sukupuolijärjestystä, naisurheilijat voivat muuttaa asioita.

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## APPENDIX

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. When, how and why did you start judo?
2. Can you describe your judo career so far?
3. What were your favorite moments?
4. What were the most challenging/difficult/stressful moments?
5. How did you cope with these challenges?
6. Is there anything that you find challenging or stressful today? Can you describe a recent incident in the training when you experienced stress?
7. What is it in judo that you like the most?
8. How do you get along with your teammates and coach?
9. Are there many women training in your club? If not, how does that make you feel?
10. If there aren't that many women training in your club, why you think is that? Can you think of any strategies that could be used to increase the numbers of female participants?
11. Does training judo affect your social life?
12. Has judo given you any skills that could be transferred to every-day life?
13. What do your friends and family think that you are doing judo?
14. What are your plans for the future?

## **ORIGINAL PAPERS**

### **I**

#### **PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON MARTIAL ARTISTS: A CRITICAL VIEW FROM A CULTURAL PRAXIS FRAME- WORK**

by

Kavoura, A., Ryba, T.V., & Kokkonen, M. 2012.

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# Psychological Research on Martial Artists

## A Critical View from a Cultural Praxis Framework

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### **Abstract**

In this article, we problematize sport psychology research on martial artists and offer some suggestions for advancing our knowledge in this area of research and practice. First, we review the previous research in the field. Then we introduce “cultural praxis” as a theoretical framework that will guide our analysis. Finally, we engage sociological studies of female fighters in conjunction with the adopted theoretical lens to outline the limitations of sport psychological research with regards to the experiences of women. It seems that the majority of the studies have used the male athlete as the norm, while research on the female athlete remains limited and focused on “differences”. Focusing persistently on gender differences, without drawing at all on gender theory reflects a gender bias, which seems to be engrained in sport psychology studies. Recent sociological studies have shed some light on the experiences of female martial artists, but have paid scant attention to the constantly changing locale in which female athletes operate. Here, we suggest “cultural praxis” as an intervention to gain insights into the behaviors, values, and emotions of the *other sex* athletes.

*Key words:* combat sports, martial arts, cultural praxis, female athletes, gender



Feminist researchers have argued that women's martial arts, similar to women's participation in other traditionally male sports, have not been taken seriously (Halbert, 1997), and have largely been hidden from history (Hargreaves, 1997). Although women have partaken in martial arts far longer than most people would ever suspect and female participation in combat sports has increased recently (Hargreaves, 1997; Macro, Viveiros, & Cipriano, 2009), research on this subject remains a relatively new field.

While sport psychology research on martial arts has been reviewed in the past (see Fuller's review, 1988; Martin, 2006, for a literature review on the psychological benefits of martial arts training; and Vertonghen & Theeboom, 2010, for a review on the psychological outcomes for youth of martial arts training), this paper is an attempt at an updated review of the existing research in the field, and an examination of the literature from the gender and cultural studies viewpoint. In this review, we use the terms combat sports and martial arts interchangeably to refer to all combat systems. Furthermore, this paper aims at advancing the arguments for a contextualised approach in sport psychology made by critical scholars of sport (e.g., Krane & Baird, 2005; Ryba & Wright, 2005; Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009; Thorpe, 2009). Following these aims, first we review the extant sport psychology research on martial artists. Then we introduce "cultural praxis" as a theoretical framework that will guide our analysis. Finally, we draw on sociological studies of female fighters in conjunction with the adopted theoretical lens to offer a critical gender analysis.

## Methods

We searched for relevant articles in the PsycInfo and SPORTDiscus with full text databases, using the key words of martial arts, combat sports, karate, judo, jiu jitsu, boxing, wrestling, taekwondo, gender, and psychology that appear either in the title, abstract or among identified key words. For reasons of accessibility, we limited our review to English language research articles published in international journals. We excluded non-scientific articles and research irrelevant to our topic, such as testing of athletes' physical fitness. Psychological research that used non-competitive forms of martial arts (e.g., tai chi, aikido) was also excluded, as our focus is on athletes and not on recreational participants. However, we

included studies that had a mixed sample of competitive and non-competitive martial artists. Sociological studies that emerged in our database search were included to critique the existing sport psychology research.

There were 38 psychological and sociological, refereed journal articles, published between 1980 and 2010, that met the established criteria. Adopting a “presentist” viewpoint, which entails the reflection of past research through the lens of present-day knowledge (Kontos, 2010), our analysis of the identified studies was guided by the following questions: What research questions do sport psychologists tend to investigate while studying female vs. male martial artists? What theories inform their research on gender? How are gender differences explained? What are the implications of the extant psychological research for how female and male athletes are constituted?

## Reviewing extant sport psychology research

### *Sport psychology studies on competitive martial artists*

In this section, we offer a brief summary of reviewed psychological research on men and women in combat sports. Based on the nature of the sample, we grouped the papers into two categories: 1) studies on competitive martial artists and 2) studies with mixed samples of competitive and non-competitive martial artists (see Tables 1 and 2). In this overview, we maintain language used by the authors of the reviewed articles.

The earliest published sport psychology research on competitive athletes, generated by our database search, is a paper by d'Arripe-Longueville, Fournier and Dubois (1998) examining coaches' and athletes' perceptions concerning their effective interactions. In-depth interviews of male coaches and female athletes of the French judo national team revealed that the coaches used an authoritarian interaction style. Coaches perceived strategies such as provoking athletes verbally, displaying indifference, entering into direct conflict, and showing preferences as effective, and believed that pushing athletes to their limits makes them mentally tougher. In their interactions with the coaches, female athletes (who could not question the coaches' authority) implemented strategies of showing diplomacy, achieving exceptional performance, soliciting coaches directly, diversifying information sources, and bypassing conventional rules.

Table 1 Sport psychology studies on competitive martial artists

<i>Year</i>	<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Sample (n)</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Martial art</i>	<i>Research focus</i>
1998	d'Arripe-Longueville et al.	9	F	Judo	Coach-athlete interaction
2001	Szabo & Parkin	21	M, F	Karate	Training deprivation
2004	Robazza et al.	10	M, F	Karate	Emotions
2004	Ruiz & Hanin	16	M, F	Karate	Emotions
2004	Ruiz & Hanin	43	M, F	Karate	Emotions
2004	Ruiz & Hanin	63	M, F	Karate	Emotions
2004	Gentigon et al.	2	M	Judo	Achievement goals
2004	Mroczkowska	69	M, F	Fencing	Motivation
2005	Hill & Barton	–	M	Boxing, Taekwondo, Wrestling	Color effects
2005	Rowe et al.	–	M	Judo	Color effects
2007	Mroczkowska	82	F	Fencing, Judo	Motivation and "masculinity"
2008	Dijkstra & Preenen	–	M	Judo	Color effects
2009	Mroczkowska	70	M, F	Fencing	Perceptions of competence

*Note.* We indicate the gender of the participants using "F" for female and "M" for male. The symbol "–" is used to indicate that the study was based on the analysis of contest outcomes.

Examining the psychological impact of a one-week period of deprivation from training at brown and black belt levels in Shotokan karate, Szabo and Parkin (2001) found that advanced athletes experienced a severe mood disturbance during the one week of abstinence from training, irrespective of the individual's sex. Szabo and Parkin speculated that this 'surprising' finding might be due to the fact that the female athletes performed martial arts at an advanced level, and therefore developed particular traits or characteristics fostered by values and training practices at black belt level in martial arts.

Research of Hanin and colleagues stemmed from the *Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning* (IZOF) model and focused on the emotions of highly-skilled karateka (Robazza, Bortoli, & Hanin, 2004; Ruiz & Hanin, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c). Robazza and colleagues (2004) investigated the effectiveness of individual-oriented predictions of performance in Italian athletes. Specifically, the authors examined the practical utility of the in/out-of-zone notion as applied to the idiosyncratic intensity and content of emotions, bodily symptoms, and task-specific qualities in predicting performance assessed by individualised emotional profiles. Results showed that the emotions and bodily responses of the athletes differed between successful and average performances.

Ruiz and Hanin (2004a, 2004b, 2004c) extended the research on performance and athletes' subjective emotional experiences. Investigating the utility of integrating metaphor self-generation method and individualised emotion profiling in the description of performance states in elite Spanish karateka, Ruiz and Hanin (2004a) concluded that the content of metaphors that the athletes used to describe their emotional states was different prior to, during, and after performances as well as across best and worst competition. High action readiness was manifested in best performance situations, while low action readiness was reflected in worst performance situations. A follow-up further revealed that the original metaphors were retained, indicating that athletes' perception of performance situation remains stable over time. Athletes experienced anger more frequently after worst performances, although anger symptoms were present in both best and worst performances. The words that the athletes used to describe their anger states, as well as the intensity of anger in best and worst performances, varied considerably for each individual, indicating the highly idiosyncratic nature of anger descriptors and intensity, and the need for individualized measures and interventions (Ruiz & Hanin, 2004b). Ruiz and Hanin (2004c) further found that ka-

rate athletes' optimal states were characterized by both pleasant and unpleasant emotions, and were perceived as temporary and dynamic. This finding, according to the authors, indicates the need for self-regulation to maintain these states. Findings also revealed that athletes did use different strategies to produce these states, such as relaxation techniques and visualization.

Several scholars have focused on achievement goal orientations and motivational processes of martial art athletes. Gernigon, d'Arripe-Longueville, Delignières, and Ninot (2004) explored how states of involvement toward mastery, performance approach, and performance-avoidance goals were interrelated and activated during a practice of judo combat. In other words, authors explored whether athletes can experience more than one state (task and ego involvement) at a given moment. A judo training session was video recorded and the study was based on the combat between two male, national level judo athletes. The judokas were asked to watch the video and indicate their moment-to-moment levels of involvement toward each goal. Goal involvement states were subject to fast variations that could result in frequent changes in the dominant goal focus. The authors further concluded that states of mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance involvement can be interrelated in all kinds of patterns.

Mrockowska (2004) investigated gender differences in motivation and success expectance in a group of fencers that was divided into four subgroups (women with high vs. low success expectance, men with high vs. low success expectance). Self-ratings revealed that men with lower success anticipation rate internal motives (such as friendship and enjoyment) significantly higher than men with high success expectance, who are strongly motivated by external motives (such as winning and social appreciation). No significant differences were found between the two subgroups of women; however, there was a tendency for women with strong self-confidence in their abilities to be prompt to follow internal motives.

More recently Mrockowska (2007) investigated whether women with dissimilar patterns of "masculinity" function differently when placed in rivalry situations. Particularly, the author studied professional female fencers and judokas, with regard to their cognitive-motivational structures of personality (motivation to achieve, sense of internal versus external control, and self-evaluation of own predispositions and chances of success in sport) after dividing them into two groups of high and low

expression of “masculine” pattern. Questionnaires revealed that the athletes with a strongly developed “maleness” perceived their future success with greater probability and rated their psychophysical features, efforts and capabilities in sport higher than did their poorly “masculine” counterparts. Furthermore, the female athletes with the weakly developed “masculine” pattern expressed a fearful motivation of achievements, which translates into perceiving threats rather than factors favoring arrival at the desired goal. The author concluded that “in a rivalry situation a woman without mental readiness to use the ‘masculine’ pattern fears much worse than her counterpart presenting with a pronounced willingness to enjoy the man-like repertoire of behaviors” (Mrockowska, 2007, p. 283).

In another study, Mrockowska’s (2009) comparison of the perceptions of competence and aspirations between female and male fencers revealed that “women’s perceptions of the high chance of sporting success was a much rarer phenomenon than in the case of men” (Mrockowska, 2009, p. 232). More than half of the female athletes estimated their chances of sporting success as average, while more than half of the male athletes estimated their probability of success as high. Moreover, women with high self-assessment of the chances of success were characterized by a strong task motivational orientation and high self-assessment of their own sporting abilities. In contrast, women with low self-assessment of chances of success were characterized by a strong ego motivational orientation and low self-assessment of their sporting predispositions.

A number of research papers focused on the effect of certain colours in contest outcomes. Hill and Barton (2005) analysed outcomes from the 2004 Olympic Games of the men divisions in boxing, taekwondo, Greco-Roman wrestling, and freestyle wrestling and found that wearing a red outfit was associated with a higher winning probability compared to wearing a blue outfit. Hill and Barton offered an explanation based on evolutionary psychology, arguing that red colour is a signal of male dominance in many animal species. Rowe, Harris and Roberts (2005) proposed that this effect is not unique for red coloration. After analysing outcomes of men’s judo contests in the 2004 Olympic Games, they found a significant winning bias for athletes wearing a blue outfit relative to those wearing a white outfit. They proposed that colour of the outfit might affect opponent’s visibility which is crucial for performance. However, Dijkstra and Preenen (2008) argued that there exists no winning bias for blue in judo and that findings by Rowe et al. were perplexing.



After re-analysing the outcomes of the 2004 men's Olympic Games, as well as additional contest outcomes of 71 major judo tournaments, authors concluded that athletes wearing blue are no more likely to win than those wearing white.

*Sport psychology studies with mixed samples*

It seems that sport psychology research on mixed samples of competitive and non-competitive martial artists started much earlier than research focused exclusively on competitive athletes (see Table 2). As Gill and Kamphoff (2010) explain, this might be due to the strong emphasis on *applied* sport psychology during the 1990s that narrowed down the research focus to performance outcomes and elite sport.

The earliest published sport psychology research generated by our database search is a paper by Rothpearl (1980), examining personality traits of martial artists. Self-reports revealed that intermediate athletes showed a greater variety of hostile modes of expression than both beginner and advanced athletes. In general, the effects of martial arts training on aggressiveness have gathered great research attention. It seems that long-term martial arts training can reduce aggressiveness (Daniels & Thornton 1990, 1992; Lamarre & Nosanchuk, 1999; Nosanchuk, 1981; Skelton, Glynn, & Berta, 1991), especially when training includes elements from the traditional approaches to martial arts, such as kata (Nosanchuk & MacNeil, 1989). Specifically, Nosanchuk (1981) and later Lamarre and Nosanchuk (1999) focused on the effects of Asian martial arts training on aggressiveness, revealing a decrease in aggressiveness over the years of practice, which was independent of the participants' sex (Lamarre & Nosanchuk, 1999). Comparing self-reported data from male martial artists and athletes of other sports, Daniels and Thornton (1990, 1992) suggested that participation in the martial arts is associated, over time, with decreased feelings of assault and verbal hostility.

With regard to gender, some interesting results were found by Bjorkqvist and Varhama (2001), who investigated whether karatekas have more negative attitudes toward violent conflict resolution than wrestlers and boxers, noncontact athletes, and controls practicing no sports. The findings showed that male karateka held relatively negative attitudes toward violent conflict resolution, whereas the opposite was noted for female karateka. The attitude scores of female karateka were higher than those of other female groups, suggesting that they may be more prone to accept violent conflict resolution compared to other female participants.

Table 2 Sport psychology studies with mixed samples (competitive and non-competitive athletes)

Year	Author	Sample (n)	Gender	Martial art	Research focus
1980	Rothpearl	152	M, F	Tang Soo Do	Personality traits
1981	Nosanchuk	41	–	Karate, Taekwondo	Aggressiveness
1982	Miller et al.	48	F	Judo, Jiu-jitsu	Fearfulness
1989	Nosanchuk & MacNeil	38	M, F	Karate, Taekwondo, Jiu-jitsu	Aggressiveness
1990	Daniels & Thornton	90	–	Jiu-jitsu, Karate	Aggressiveness
1991	Skelton et al.	68	M, F	Taekwondo	Aggressiveness
1992	Daniels & Thornton	79	M	Karate, Jiu-jitsu	Aggressiveness
1995	Ripoll et al.	18	–	Boxing	Visual search activity
1998	Columbus & Rice	17	M, F	Karate, Taekwondo, Tai chi	Experiential dimensions
1999	Lamarre & Nosanchuk	51	M, F	Judo	Aggressiveness
1999	Williams & Elliott	16	M	Karate	Visual search activity
2000	Gernigon & Le Bars	164	–	Judo, Aikido	Achievement goals
2001	Bjorkqvist & Varhama	319	M, F	Karate, Wrestling, Boxing,	Attitudes toward violence
2005	Endresen & Olweus	477	M	Boxing, Wrestling, Oriental martial arts	Aggressiveness
2006	Rowold	186	M, F	Karate	Coach leadership styles
2010	Ko et al.	307	M, F	Various	Motivation for participation

*Note.* Some of these studied have used control groups of non-athletes or athletes from other sports, but we have not included this information in this table. For more information, please refer to the text or the original article. F = female, M = male, – = the gender of participants was not indicated in the reviewed article.

Authors assumed that women may associate karate with a right to defend themselves physically against assault, while men tend to associate karate with nonviolent defense.

Some additional question-marks remain regarding the psychological effects of martial arts training on children and youth. While research by Skelton et al. (1991) showed that high level of taekwondo training was associated with less aggressiveness, Endresen and Olweus (2005) found contradictory results, questioning the positive effects of martial arts training. Endresen and Olweus (2005) examined the relationship between participation in power or fight sports (boxing, wrestling, weight lifting, oriental martial arts) and violent and antisocial behaviour in young boys. Participation in these sports actually increased violent and antisocial behaviour.

Early work by Miller, Wagner, and Edwards (1982) focused on fearfulness. It would seem that this study did not contextualize martial arts as competitive sports. Investigating the psychological effects of practicing martial arts as a form of self-defense, Miller et.al (1982) studied whether women enrolled in beginner and advanced judo-jujitsu classes in a mid-west American city were more fearful than women enrolled in fitness or crafts classes. The authors reasoned that “as women increasingly enter domains previously perceived as male dominated, it seems likely that at least some are doing so as a reaction to threat, and the coping methods subsequently utilized take an added significance” (Miller et al., 1982, p. 341). In their survey, women in the beginner’s judo-jujitsu group perceived the world as more threatening than women in the advanced judo-jujitsu group, fitness group or crafts group. As it was only the beginner judo-jujitsu participants who exhibited significant fearfulness and bodily concern, the researchers suggested that the advanced group was more successful in managing perceived environmental threat due to their sporting achievements. Miller and colleagues concluded that results obtained, support the contention that “certain characteristics are peculiar to women who seek out a particular physical activity” (p. 342), thus implicating fearfulness and bodily concerns to be “peculiar” to women who enroll in martial arts.

Another topic that gathered research attention was visual search activity in martial arts. Ripoll, Kerlirzin, Stein, and Reine (1995) analyzed information processing, decision making, and visual search activity in French boxing. Six experts, six intermediate, and six novice athletes whose gender was not indicated were asked to solve different boxing

situations, in which a boxer, considered as an opponent, was video-recorded and the image projected into a screen. The participants had to respond to the attacks of the opponent by manipulating a joystick. The visual search activity of the athletes was recorded and analyzed, and results indicated that experts adopted a more efficient search pattern while they also focused on different display areas than novices. Continuing the research on visual search, Williams and Elliott (1999) examined the effects of cognitive anxiety on anticipation and visual search behavior, as well as the differences in anticipation and visual search strategy between expert and novice karatekas. Results indicated that there were no differences between groups in number of fixations, mean fixation duration, or total number of fixation locations per trial. However, increased search activity was more pronounced in novices, with fixations moving from central to peripheral body locations.

Columbus and Rice (1998) attempted to shed some light on the dimensions by which American martial artists describe martial arts participation as a meaningful endeavour. Authors argued that even though Asian martial arts grow in popularity in North America, little is known about everyday experiences of the American practitioners that might influence participation, which might differ a lot from the traditional Asian values attributed to martial arts. Phenomenological analysis of written narratives of karate, taekwondo, and tai chi practitioners revealed four contexts in which martial arts were considered as worthwhile activities for participants: criminal victimization, growth and discovery, life transition, and task performance. In each of the four contexts, martial arts participation was experienced as valuable when it helped an individual's adaptation to everyday life circumstances. Moreover, each of these contexts revealed distinct and meaningful relations between participants' body/self, others, feelings, situation outcome, and martial arts practice. Thus, authors suggested that benefits of martial arts training may transfer to everyday life situations.

Gernigon and Le Bars (2000) investigated whether achievement goal orientations (task and ego) of children and adult practitioners of judo and aikido might be affected by the type of martial art that is practiced (competitive: judo vs. non-competitive: aikido), the level of experience (beginner vs. experienced), and the gender of the athlete. Children practicing aikido proved to be generally more task-oriented than children practicing judo. Furthermore, in the children's group, experienced aikidokas were less ego-oriented than beginner aikidokas and experienced

judokas, whereas experienced judokas were more ego-oriented than beginner judokas. Regarding the adult group, experienced aikidokas were both less task- and ego-oriented than beginner aikidokas and experienced judokas. Regarding gender, no effects for task- and ego-orientations reached significance. According to the authors, this finding was in contrast to the hypotheses and to previous literature addressing gender differences in goal orientations. Gernigon and Le Bars hypothesized that the nature of the investigated activities could have levelled gender differences:

Aikido and judo are both fighting sports and could be considered as reflecting masculine values. Therefore, these activities could have fostered masculine goal orientations (i.e., low task and high ego orientations) or could have been more attractive for persons with such characteristics, thus resulting in more homogeneity in males and females' goal orientations. (p. 175)

Ko, Kim, and Valacich (2010) examined motivation factors that influence an individual's participation in martial arts in order to provide leaders of the industry with meaningful managerial implications. These martial arts participants appeared to be highly motivated by growth-related motivation (e.g., value, development and actualization). Motivation of martial arts practitioners varied across types of martial arts disciplines, competition orientation, and past experiences.

Rowold (2006) explored students' perceptions of coaches' leadership behaviours in a martial arts setting. The author aimed to test whether coaches' behaviours can be described by a broad range of transformational, transactional, and non-leadership behaviours, as well as to provide information about both the range and effectiveness of distinct leadership styles of sport coaches. Participants in this study were German karatekas. Results supported a nine-factor structure of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. In addition, the hypothesis that transformational leadership scales accounted for unique variance in coaches' leadership effectiveness beyond that of transactional and leadership scales was confirmed.

In sum, sport psychology research on competitive martial artists, studied alone or together with non-competitive martial artists, has generally focused on emotions, achievement goal orientations and other motivational issues, and coaches' relationships with their athletes. Much of the psychological knowledge base in martial arts was developed by inference from positivistic research with white male athletes. Among the 29 sport

psychology studies that we reviewed above, only eight contributed to the body of literature on female athletes or examined gender as a factor in their research. Certain psychological issues, such as the effects of uniform colour on performance and visual search activity have been studied based only on male participants. Furthermore, some studies conducted with female athletes did not draw at all on gender theory. For example, d'Arripe-Longuevill et al.'s (1998) present the strategies that female athletes use in order to interact successfully with their male coaches without engaging any gender critique of institutionalised power. Moreover, some of the papers did not even indicate gender of the participants, naturalising the male fighters as normative and worthy subjects to study.

### “Cultural praxis” as a discursive framework

In this section we introduce “cultural praxis” (Ryba & Wright, 2005) as a theoretical framework to guide our analysis of the reviewed empirical literature. Cultural praxis is premised on a feminist assertion that sport is a field where men continue to have ideological dominance and power, while women are constrained by dominant ideologies and gender stereotypes (Gill, 2001; Hargreaves, 2000; Messner, 1988; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Sisjord, 1997). The cultural praxis framework, by virtue of drawing on a feminist poststructuralist perspective (Butler, 1997; Rail, 2002; Weedon, 1987, 1999), provides us with the understandings how gendered power relations are (re)produced and contested within the disciplinary research practices of sport psychology.

Problematizing the way mainstream sport psychology trails its research and practice, Ryba and Wright (2005) proposed cultural praxis as an approach to sport psychology that deals with issues of marginalization and representation. Considerable attention in Ryba and Wright's work is given to the articulation of sport psychology with cultural studies in an effort to open up the psychological study of sport to cultural modes of analyses of psyche and behavior. Within a dominant sport psychological discourse, addressing diversity tends to take the form of an “add-on” approach, where the *other* subjects are included in research studies merely to be tested against the normative white, male, heterosexual and often North American subjects (Ryba & Wright, 2010). Postcolonial scholars (Said, 1978; Smith, 1999; Spivak, 1988) have argued that the West constructs the Other as different and exotic through a variety of cultural rep-



representations—representations that “speak for” the homogenized Other without offering an understanding of the Other.

Informed by the feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial perspectives, cultural praxis problematizes the term “athlete” as never fixed due to the subject’s fragmented and multiple identifications with various (gendered, ethnicized and racialized) discourses. To grasp psychic realities of the female fighter, therefore, would require transgressing the binary logic of “either/or” and untangling the multiplicity of cultural meanings inscribed on the athlete’s embodied psyche, which are predicated on “the logic of neither, nor, and both” (Helstein, 2005, p. 4). It is important to note that within the cultural praxis framework, the focus is not merely on textual subjectivity but on materiality of psychic experiences as “revealed *through* the subjectival first person” (Ingham, Blissmer, & Davidson, 1999, p. 239). In this sense, the praxis component works in tandem with analytical components of theory and research to understand and reassert the emotional and (un)conscious psychic events of the subject as they acquire meaning within available discourses.

Indeed, female martial artists cannot be understood as a homogeneous group. Having been socialized into combat sporting systems in various cultures as well as being subjects of multiple discourses such as class, race, gender, sexuality, religion, and age, female athletes have different motives and goals for participation in martial arts. In addition, different styles of martial arts require different skills and knowledge, and are embedded in different philosophies with their own sets of values. Furthermore, each training club attempts to form a community with its unique culture. This communal *glocal* culture is shaped by the globalised culture of the sport in juxtaposition with the local culture of the region and is, moreover, understood in a unique way by the club members. As cultural praxis advocates situating psychological research and/or applied work in the glocal matrix of a sporting culture without losing sight of lived experiences of the “athlete,” there is no need to ignore or subjugate complexity of difference by bringing it to the common denominator of an “average” subject. Instead, attempts are made to understand psychic subjectivity, how psychological processes of the subject are enacted by the context, and what practices can be implemented to engender progressive change in female martial arts.

Ryba, Schinke, and Tenenbaum (2010) argue that in the age of global mobility, it is increasingly important for sport psychologists working with transnational athletes to recognize that psyche is cultural and politi-



cal, and not only a matter of neurological processes and cognition of the individual subject. Naturally, as we argue, psyche has an emotional side to it. At the moment, there is a scarcity of research that examines how psychological constructs acquire meaning and are manifested in various sports across cultures. It also would seem essential to understand the complex dynamics between global and local martial arts cultures and how female subjectivity is articulated in and through everyday cultural practices of these communities. While there are many theoretical perspectives on how to address these questions, we believe that “cultural praxis” offers a discursive space to account for difference, hybridity, disorder and multiplicity in sporting communities (on community of articulation, see Helstein, 2005), and for a more nuanced and critical examination of the culturally constituted psychological functions of female martial arts athletes.

## Critiquing the status quo

In this section, we analyse the reviewed sport psychology research through the adopted theoretical lens, in order to offer a gender critique. Furthermore, we substantiate our points drawing on sociological studies of female fighters that emerged in our search (see Table 3).

Feminist scholars have argued that in the male dominated world of sports, most often men are studied, and not women (Gill & Kamphoff, 2010; Krane, 1994; Ryba & Wright, 2005, 2010). This seems to be the case with research on martial arts as well. Moreover, it seems that different topics are researched when men are studied vs. when women are studied. In this paper we examined what research questions mainstream sport psychologists tend to investigate when studying female martial artists, and what questions they ask when studying their male equivalents. It appeared that research on men has focused on various psychological issues that usually deal with performance and competition, or with the psychological effects of martial arts training, while research on women has focused on “differences” and “similarities” by comparing female martial artists with their male equivalents or with women outside the martial art world. For example: Are female martial artists more fearless than other women? What are their attitudes toward violent conflict resolution compared to their male equivalents or to non-athlete women? What are their motives and their expectations of success compared to male martial

Table 3 Sociological/gender studies

Year	Author	Sample (n)	Gender	Martial art	Research focus	Summary of results
1997	Sisjord	7	F, M	Wrestling	Perceptions of physicality	Wrestling experiences are closely intertwined with the gender status and perceptions of physicality in the wrestling discourse.
1997	Halbert	12	F	Boxing	Experiences	Female athletes experience discrimination and stereotypes, and they use several strategies to manage their identity.
1997	Hargreaves	–	F	Boxing	Meanings and identities	Different meanings and discourses can be applied to women's boxing, but always a diverse shaping of the female body occurs.
1997	Young	60	F	Wrestling, Martial arts, Other sports	Sense of violence, injury and physicality	Internal contradiction and ambiguities in the way traditionally male-defined sports are lived and made sense of by women.
2000	Mennesson	12	F	Boxing	Identities	Women boxers challenging the gender order but in the same time displaying traditional modes of femininity.
2007	Guerlandel & Mennesson	6	F, M	Judo	Gender relations/interactions	Judo framework conflicts with that of gender expression, whereas the competitors must position themselves as men or women but also be recognized as judokas.
2008	Sisjord & Kristiansen	8	F, M	Wrestling	Athletes' perceptions of media coverage	Athletes perceived media coverage to be limited, gender stereotyped, and focused on sensational aspects and scandals.
2009	Macro et al.	47	F	Wrestling	Experiences related to identity, body consciousness, sexuality, and femininity.	Female wrestlers were comfortable with their bodies and the public perception of their femininity and sexuality, and did not feel a gender-role conflict nor a necessity to engage in performing hegemonic femininity.
2009	Sisjord & Kristiansen	8	F, M	Wrestling	Experiences and enactment of the wrestler's role	Different ways in which female wrestlers perform femininity. Gender performativity appeared to be dependent on cultural capital of the competitive status.

Note. F = female, M = male, – = the study was based on literature

artists? Overall, and similar to other sports, the male martial artist appear to be the norm which the sport psychological knowledge is based on, while the female martial artist is examined later on, as being “similar” or “different” to the norm. Thus, many psychological issues have been studied based only on male participants. In addition, while rich research exists on the psychological impacts of martial arts training on boys (Endresen & Olweus, 2005, as well as Reynes & Lorant, 2002a, 2002b, 2004 that were not included in our review because of the non-competitive nature of their samples, but are worth mentioning here), almost nothing exists for girls (see Vertonghen and Theeboom, 2010, for a review of studies on youth).

Investigating what theories inform gender research on martial arts, it appeared that mainstream sport psychology has focused persistently on gender differences, without drawing at all on gender theory. Drawing mainly upon quantitative methods, most of the researchers were very surprised when they found no gender differences in their investigations (Gernigon & Le Bars, 2000; Lamarre & Nosanchuk, 1999; Szabo & Parkin, 2001). Trying to explain this lack of gender differences, they came to the conclusion that elite martial artists develop “masculine” traits. Only two studies found gender differences. Mrockowska (2009) suggested that women’s perceptions of high chance in sporting success is a much rarer phenomenon than in the case of men, while Bjorkqvist and Varhama (2001) suggested that women held relatively more positive attitudes toward violent conflict resolution.

The differentiation of topics and research questions when it comes to the study of women vs. men reflect a gender bias which seems to be engrained in sport psychology studies. This gender bias, in conjunction with a lack of gender/social theory underpinnings of the analyses of gender differences or similarities, is very problematic and has negative implications on how female athletes are constituted. Moreover, by comparing female competitive martial artists with female non-athletes or with male martial artists, many of the sport psychology studies cited above reinforce the stereotypes which suggest that female martial art athletes are somehow different from the so-called “normal” women, such as claims that certain characteristics are particular to women who seek out physical activities as martial arts (Miller et al., 1982), that elite martial artists develop “masculine” traits (Gernigon & Le Bars, 2000; Mrockowska, 2007; Szabo & Parkin, 2001), or that female martial artists may be more prone to accept violent conflict resolutions in contrast to other women

(Bjorkqvist & Varhama, 2001). Additionally, some studies reinforce the gender stereotypes that female martial art athletes are somehow “weaker” than their male counterparts, or that women’s perceptions of high chance in sporting success is a much rarer phenomenon than in the case of men (Mrockowska, 2009).

Approaches of this kind carry various limitations and fail to give insights into women’s experiences, instead presenting female martial artists as a homogenous group with similar personality characteristics and motives and reinforcing the social constitution of female martial artists as essentially different from male athletes or from female non-athletes. Several feminist scholars have pointed out the harmful effects of gender stereotyping on the psyche of the female martial artist (see for example, Halbert, 1997; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008). In contrast, regarding the constitution of the male martial artist, sport psychological scholarship seems to use ‘him’ as the norm, thereby preserving the male power and dominance in the domain of martial arts. For example, d’Arripe-Longueville and colleagues (1998) overemphasize the “success” of the authoritative and patriarchal system of elite sports:

We discovered a system that, while most sport psychologists would consider it unhealthy and require change, has been remarkably successful. Conventional literature holds that such tough coaching styles could lead to negative outcomes for athletes’ personal development and, consequently, performance, specifically with the youngest athletes. The present study suggests that highly successful athletes have coping strategies and do not seem to be affected by coaches’ often unpleasant decisions and behaviors. (p. 330)

In contrast to the sport psychology studies that attempted to compare female martial artists with other groups, other scholars have followed a different approach (see Table 3). Drawing on qualitative methods these studies have shed some light on the experiences of the female athlete. In concluding this section, it is important to acknowledge the contribution of trailblazing psychological research to the study of male and female martial artists, which, to our delight, is internationally represented. Similar to a large percentage of works pertaining to sport psychology, however, the reviewed studies focus on male athletes and normalize the findings as universal. Moreover, the reviewed psychological studies are complacent in identifying statistically significant differences among various segments of the population (e.g., men vs. women; athletes vs. non-athletes) without systematic contextualisation of the findings in the

particular socio-historical, political, and cultural matrices of sports. In so doing, in the few studies that examined sex, the problematic framing of psychological findings reinforces rigid gender stereotypes of martial arts athletes, hence obscuring nuanced aspects of female embodiment and psyche from scientific insight and further research. In contrast, the sociological studies revealed complex social structures manifested in gender inequalities, clearly linked to how female martial artists experience one of men's 'last' cultural spaces. Despite this, a myriad of cultural meanings defining femininity and sexuality (among others), inextricably intertwined with female martial arts athletes' experiences of the self, remain uncharted.

## Concluding remarks

In a recent anthology entitled "The Cultural Turn in Sport Psychology", Ryba and Wright (2010) posed the following question for reflection: are female athletes essentially different from male athletes, or are they socially constituted as different, and hence exhibit different behavioral and emotional responses? Indeed, as Gill and Kamphoff (2010) concluded, it is "how people *think* males and females differ [that] is more important than how they actually differ" (p. 64).

The findings of our review illustrate that there is a need for further research focused on contextualized understanding of the experience of women martial artists, since few psychological studies have been conducted, and those few have neglected to examine the female athlete thoroughly. In addition, our review revealed that the use of "gender" in mainstream sport psychology scholarship has not changed over the time, even though scholars from cultural or/and feminist backgrounds have called persistently for a revision and expansion of the sport psychological knowledge base. While there are many ways to do psychological research on gender, in this article we have suggested "cultural praxis" as a suitable discursive framework for gaining insights into the experiences of women martial artists. Sport psychology as cultural praxis is capable of providing multilevel understandings of female subjectivity because it considers the broader cultural, social, and historical contexts in which female athletes live and construct their behaviors in sport. We contend that within the cultural praxis framework that locates psychological research in the glo-

cal matrix of a sporting culture, additional insights into articulated psychic realities of female fighters may be attained.

In conclusion, we aim to encourage scholars in the field of sport psychology to embrace gender and culture as integral components in their research. Re-formulating psychological questions through the lens of culturally constituted psyche is not merely a theoretical exercise. Psychological research that neglects psychic realities of human beings, predicated on the sociocultural context, is prone to misleading interpretations and explanations of scientific results. The risk of feeding misrepresentations into popular consciousness becomes higher at a time when most academics have added a task of translating research findings for public consumption to their job descriptions. Thus, without a critical analysis of social norms and cultural meanings underpinning psychological processes and behavioral manifestations of female martial artists, there is a danger of perpetuating gender myths and even triggering moral hysteria. As researchers, we are responsible for exposing the ways in which gender oppression manifests itself in everyday practices to instigate the progressive social change in martial arts cultures.

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## II

### **NEGOTIATING FEMALE JUDOKA IDENTITIES IN GREECE: A FOUCAULDIAN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

by

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## Negotiating female judoka identities in Greece: A Foucauldian discourse analysis

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** The objectives of this paper are to trace the discourses through which female Greek judokas articulate their sporting experiences and to explore how they construct their identities through the negotiation of sociocultural beliefs and gender stereotypes.

**Design:** This article is based on interview data from a larger ethnographic research with women judo athletes, grounded in a cultural praxis framework.

**Method:** Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted during fieldwork in Greece. Interview data were analyzed drawing on a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis.

**Results:** We identified four concepts—biology, gender, femininity, and judo/sport—that were central to unearthing the discourses in which female Greek judokas constructed their identities. Female athletes (strategically) negotiated multiple identities, each serving different purposes.

**Conclusion:** The gender power dynamics in Greek society at large are reproduced in the sporting experience of Greek female judokas. Although women have agency to negotiate their identity, they tend to accept the “given” subject positions within dominant discourses of gender relations. By doing so, female athletes become agents in the reproduction of patriarchal power.

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## Negotiating a female judoka identity in Greece

In most cultures, images of fighting are incompatible with the socially constructed ideal of femininity. Since sport is one of the major contemporary sites where physical prowess is paramount, the taken-for-granted association of combat with the male physique and psyche creates gendered relations of power, which perpetuate patriarchal structures in the cultural field of martial arts (Halbert, 1997; Hargreaves, 1997; McNaughton, 2012; Sisjord, 1997; Velija, Mierzwinski, & Fortune, 2013). Feminist researchers and critical scholars of sport psychology have asserted that asymmetrical power is linked to gender inequalities and discrimination, creating additional obstacles that female athletes face in the course of their athletic (and non-athletic) development (e.g., Choi, 2000; Gill, 2007; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004).

Sporting experiences are certainly unique, but the meanings they acquire are shaped by specific social and cultural contexts

(Kavoura, Ryba, & Kokkonen, 2012; McGannon, Curtin, Schinke, & Schweinbenz, 2012). Despite the growing body of research in cultural sport psychology (CSP), little is known to date about how social norms, as well as (sub)cultural values and beliefs are implicated in the identity negotiations of female martial artists. Responding to the call from the editors of this special issue to “reveal the importance of intersectionality in CSP,” we focus on women's judo in Greece. Our purpose in this paper is to (1) trace the discourses (systems of knowledge) through which the female Greek judoka (judo athlete) articulates and makes sense of her experiences; and (2) develop a theoretically informed analytical understanding of how she constructs her identity through the negotiation of sociocultural beliefs and gender stereotypes. Our overarching goal is to produce culturally situated research, which contributes to feminist cultural praxis.

## Theoretical considerations

To explore the identity negotiations of female judoka specifically in the Greek cultural context, we drew upon the cultural praxis framework proposed by Ryba and Wright (2005). Cultural praxis was developed as a critical approach in sport psychology and

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employs cultural studies to highlight the complex interactions of power and sociocultural difference in the production of knowledge and applied work in the field. Drawing on the cultural praxis framework, scholarship by Ryba and Schinke (2009), Ryba, Stambulova, Si, and Schinke (2013), and Schinke, McGannon, Parham, and Lane (2012), added rich theoretical and methodological layers to the concept of inclusion and consideration of marginalized identities and experiences. In this paper, we focus on issues of sociocultural difference, social justice, and identity within a cultural praxis framework in order to situate our research in the glocal culture of judo. By “glocal” we indicate that the female judokas, who participated in this study, practice and understand judo in a unique way due to the juxtaposition of the sport’s globalized culture and the local Greek culture. Moreover, this research is epistemologically grounded in Foucauldian and feminist post-structuralist theories (Butler, 1990, 1997; Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1978, 1983, 1988; Weedon, 1997).

Within sport psychology, the concept of identity has been researched from diverse theoretical perspectives, such as standpoint feminist, feminist cultural studies, critical feminist, critical race and queer (e.g., Butryn, 2002; Fisher & Bredemeier, 2000; Gill, 2001; Krane et al., 2004; Krane, Waldron, Kauer, & Semerjian, 2010). The contribution of feminist post-structuralism in furthering the analysis of women’s experiences in sport and exercise as constituted within the discursive sociocultural realm has been illuminated by McGannon and Busanich (2010) in one of the first CSP textbooks “The Cultural Turn in Sport Psychology” edited by Ryba, Schinke, and Tenenbaum. From a post-structuralist perspective, identity is understood as a shifting temporary construction communicated to others, which is fluid, and a discursive accomplishment that is simultaneously local, social, cultural and political (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1988; McGannon & Busanich, 2010).

Foucault’s (1972) concept of discourse and Butler’s (1997) articulation of subjectivity are particularly useful in understanding the roles that language and cultural discourses play in the process of identity negotiation. For Foucault (1972, 1978), discourse consists of certain sets of knowledge and social practices, establishing what is accepted as reality in a given society. For example, there are cultural standards regarding a woman’s appearance, behavior, and values that shape our understanding of what is considered as feminine (e.g., youthful, thin and (hetero) sexy body; emotional and nurturing disposition) and what is not feminine (e.g., bulky body and aggressive temperament) (Krane et al., 2004; Markula, 1995; McGannon & Spence, 2012). These socially constructed sets of knowledge, or the way we talk and think about the feminine ideal, constitute a discourse of ideal femininity. Subjectivity, or who we think we are and how we situate ourselves in the world, then is constituted through the discourses to which the subject has access (Butler, 1997; McGannon & Spence, 2010, 2012; Weedon, 1997). Thus, the limited ways that female bodies are represented within dominant discourses are tied to the experiences and subjectivities of female athletes. For example, a female athlete whose subjectivity is constructed within a discourse of ideal femininity that represents the ideal body as thin and sexy might feel “not feminine enough” and experience tensions about her athletic and muscular body (Krane et al., 2004).

According to Foucault (1977, 1978), discourse entails mechanisms of power that regulate the behavior of individuals in the social body. For example, failing to conform to the cultural standards represented within a discourse of ideal femininity could have social consequences for the female athlete, such as experiences of discrimination and stigmatization, limited (and/or negative) media

attention, and fewer sponsorship opportunities (Krane et al., 2004; Shilling & Bunsell, 2009). Highlighting the relationship between discourse and power, the term “subject position” is used by Foucault (1978, 1983) to point out the ways that people are categorized into hierarchies (of normalcy, health, class, gender, etc.). A subject position is a location for people in relation to dominant discourses, associated with specific rights, limitations and ways of feeling, thinking and behaving (Weedon, 1997). For example, being subjected to a biological discourse that represents women’s biological nature as incompatible with sport (Vertinsky, 1994), a female athlete might occupy the subject position of the weak, or the one in need of help, positioning herself lower in the hierarchy than her male counterparts.

The issue of choice when negotiating identity and/or taking up a subject position has been discussed by post-structuralist scholars (e.g., Cosh, Crabb, & LeCouteur, 2013; Cosh, LeCouteur, Crabb, & Kettler, 2013; Foucault, 1978, 1983; Jiwani & Rail, 2010; McGannon & Spence, 2010). Drawing on the aforementioned literature, we consider female athletes as agentic individuals, who have agency in decision-making processes. However, women are also discursively subjected to particular subject positions, which are structured with both possibilities and constrains for action. Subsequently, identity negotiation (or identity management) is an active process that entails levels of agency, consciousness and self-knowledge (Foucault, 1983).

Previous empirical work within exercise psychology has contributed to our understanding of women’s subject positions constructed within dominant discourses of motherhood and exercise (McGannon & Schinke, 2013; McGannon & Spence, 2010), as well as within media representations of women’s exercise (McGannon & Spence, 2012), and the implications for women’s motherhood identities, experiences and exercise behavior. Within sport psychology, Cosh et al. employed a discursive psychological approach to explore issues of choice and identity in sporting retirement (Cosh, Crabb, et al., 2013) and in transition back to sport (Cosh, LeCouteur, et al., 2013) as represented within newspaper media. In addition, Crocket (2014) explored athletes’ subject positions within competitive sports in relation to sporting retirement. To our knowledge, no previous research published in a sport psychology journal has attempted to empirically study and theorize women’s identity within sport contexts using a Foucauldian approach. This study aims to extend the work exploring discourse and subject positions that already exists within sport and exercise psychology, into the area of women’s martial arts and combat sports.

In this paper we discuss the ways in which female Greek judokas construct and negotiate identity while being subjected to dominant discourses and cultural stereotypes. Specifically, we examine how they speak about themselves and what discourses offer them possibilities to make sense of themselves and their experiences. This approach opens up additional possibilities for research and practice within sport psychology by furthering our understanding of the psychological and behavioral implications of subject positioning as a useful concept to explore identity. Moreover, women’s underrepresentation in martial arts and combat sports (as in sports in general) is often presented as a “women’s issue” (Hovden, 2006). Therefore, explicating how the discursive field of power relations forms the conditions for female athletes’ understanding of themselves (as expressed in the specific ways of speaking about their sporting activities) is important for disrupting the existing taken-for-granted culture in judo. Our research offers insights for how women may act on their agency and adopt specific strategies to negotiate their identities as well as craft new subject positions within discourses.

### Previous studies on the female martial artist

In a recent review, Kavoura et al. (2012) examined the sport psychology scholarship on martial artists from gender and cultural studies perspectives. The authors argued that gender in martial arts has been overlooked as researchers have focused mainly on the male martial artist. Research on the female martial artist remains limited and concentrates on different aspects than research on the male martial artist. For instance, while mainstream sport psychology research on male martial artists emphasizes psychological issues related to performance and competition (e.g. Gernigon, d'Arripe-Longueville, Delignieres, & Ninot, 2004), study on the female martial artist focuses on the examination of differences and similarities, comparing the female martial artist to her male counterpart, or to the "ordinary" woman (Bjorkqvist & Varhama, 2001; Mroczkowska, 2004, 2009). Researchers tend to ask such questions as: Are female martial artists as eager to win as male martial artists? Are female martial artists more aggressive than ordinary women? By focusing persistently on differences and drawing predominantly on positivistic inquiries, such studies aid in the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. Female martial artists are constructed as a homogeneous group, essentially different not only from ordinary women but also different from male martial artists who appear to be the norm.

In contrast, sociological research offers rich insights on the experiences of women participating in traditionally male sports, such as bodybuilding (Shilling & Bunsell, 2009), snowboarding (Thorpe, 2009), rugby, rock climbing and ice hockey (Young, 1997). In this paper we concentrate on the rapidly expanding sociological literature on women in martial arts and combat sports (e.g. Channon, 2013; Guerandel & Mennesson, 2007; Halbert, 1997; Macro, Viveiros, & Cipriano, 2009; McNaughton, 2012; Mennesson, 2000; Mierzwinski, Velija, & Malcolm, 2014; Sisjord, 1997; Velija et al., 2013), which reveals that construction and negotiation of gendered identity for the female fighter are much more complex than once thought. Martial arts training can provide empowering, transformative experiences for women and pose clear challenges to discourses of male superiority (Channon, 2013). Women who dare to trespass into this male-dominated territory appear to "deconstruct the normal symbolic boundaries between male and female in sport" (Hargreaves, 1997, p. 33) by challenging the existing gender order, as well as gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs (Mennesson, 2000). These women "may face particular challenges with regard to gender negotiation" (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2009, p. 232), experiences of discrimination (Halbert, 1997; Sisjord, 1997; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008), and often struggle to find balance between the socially acceptable feminine identity and the identity of a fighter (Guerandel & Mennesson, 2007; Halbert, 1997; Mennesson, 2000).

From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, Kavoura et al. (2012; Kavoura, Kokkonen, & Ryba, 2014) argued that female martial artists cannot be understood as a homogeneous group. Socialized in different cultures and subjected to different discourses, female martial artists have different experiences and negotiate identity in different ways. As women's judo is largely overlooked in scholarly work, this study contributes to the growing genre of CSP by highlighting how female Greek judokas' subjectivities are discursively constructed as well as implicated in (re)producing judo practices in particular ways.

### Positioning the female judoka in the Greek culture

To provide the social setting for our research, we first draw upon the existing scholarship on gender in Greece. Second, we engage some recent sport studies indicating that sport in Greece remains a

male dominated terrain. Given the absence of current knowledge regarding the workings of gender in Greece and more specifically the ways that gender dynamics are reproduced in the sports field, we conclude this section by suggesting feminist cultural praxis and post-structuralism as approaches that can contribute in filling these gaps.

In cross-cultural research, Greece is presented as a patriarchal, masculine culture (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Although gender attitudes are more egalitarian than in the past (Marcos & Bahr, 2001) and laws have formally abolished all discrimination against women (Lazaridis, 1994), traditional values persist in Greece (Kyriazis, 1998), and women's subordination is reproduced by various mechanisms (Lazaridis, 1994). A huge gap between law and practice exists (Lazaridis, 1994), and Greece remains a country where women do not have as equal opportunities as men, compared to other European countries (Marcos & Bahr, 2001). Examining the Greek national identity, Varikas (1993) argued that holding onto traditional gender values and sexual morals can be seen as an act of resistance "to the invasion of foreign standards of behaviour" and the "cultural hegemony of the West" (p. 271).

A study by Marcos and Bahr (2001) sheds some light on the prevalent Greek gender attitudes. Greek men seem to hold less egalitarian attitudes than Greek women and factors such as age and level of education do not have a strong impact on gender attitudes. Physical education and sport science university students appear to hold even less egalitarian attitudes than other university students (Grigoriou, Chroni, Hatzigeorgiadis, & Theodorakis, 2011). Complex social mechanisms and the ways in which Greeks are socialized (mainly through family) seem to be responsible for this persistence of traditional patriarchal values. According to Athanasiadis (2007), both men and women (re)produce such values in multiple ways. Men resist change because they do not want to lose the benefits of their dominant social position, and women seem to submit because of the ease of conformity that these traditional values offer. Conforming to dominant ideologies that position women as passive agents hidden in the private space of the household and protected by male relatives, Greek women appear to develop a sense of both safety (Athanasiadis, 2007) and innocence, since excluded from power, they are not responsible for the "evils of society" (Varikas, 1993, p. 279).

Issues such as femininity and female sexuality remain unspoken in Greece where religion and traditional family values hold strong influence to this day (Athanasiadis, 2007). Arnot, Araújo, Deliyanni, and Ivinson (2000) argued that notions of femininity remain incompatible with power, and women must imitate male behavior in order to succeed in male-dominated fields. In addition to copying the male way of being and doing, Athanasiadis (2007) suggested, women also adopt the male way of seeing, even of their own bodies and sexuality.

According to Foucault (1978), family is a social structure historically connected with the control of women's bodies and sexuality within a system of traditional gender roles and values. Does this association of family with women's subordination mean that women should resist the conventional family structures? Are women who choose to be mothers or hold more conventional roles weak and passive? Are women only considered strong if they fight or play sports traditionally understood as masculine? These are some puzzling questions that post-structuralist research has the potential to answer, giving emphasis on language structures and discourses in constituting female subjectivity, as well as associated behavioural practices (see for example, McGannon & Schinke, 2013; McGannon et al., 2012).

Recent sport studies reveal that Greek cultural norms and beliefs, as well as the country's dominant religion influence the proportions of women engaging in sport and exercise (van Tuycokom, Scheerder, & Bracke, 2010), as well as the representation of women in sport



leadership roles (Chroni, Kourtesopoulou, & Kouli, 2007). Comparing gender inequalities in sports participation across Europe, van Tuyckom et al. (2010) found that Greece is one of the countries with the lowest female participation levels. Women athletes are less interested in taking up coaching, refereeing and administration roles, feeling that they would not be respected due to their gender (Chroni et al., 2007). Moreover, Greece is one of the few countries where some of the female physical education and sport science university students (depending on the institution enrolled) are still educated in single-gender classes, separated from their male counterparts (Chroni, 2006). This separation is based on gender stereotypes and dominant biological beliefs that women are biologically inferior to men and thus they would not be able to keep up in mixed-gender sports classes. Chroni (2006) argued that being educated in this context, male and female coaches and physical education teachers reproduce the same gender stereotypes when working in sports clubs or schools. Thus, the gender stereotypes in the Greek sport fields and schools are reinforced by institutions and reproduced by both men and women coaches and physical educators.

One can only wonder how female Greek judokas construct gender and negotiate identity, having to face the patriarchal beliefs of their coaches and being themselves subjected to the dominant gender stereotypes in Greece (not to mention the implications of this identity negotiation on their psychological experiences and performance). Further research is needed in order to understand the current gender dynamics and power relations in Greece, as well as how these dynamics are tied to the low numbers of female participation in sport and to the experiences of female athletes. Giving primacy to language and socially constructed discourses, feminist post-structuralism has the potential to shed light on these issues (McGannon & Busanich, 2010; McGannon & Schinke, 2013; McGannon & Spence, 2010) and cultural praxis can serve as a discursive framework for blending theory with applied work (Ryba & Wright, 2005). This is the first study exploring the experiences of female Greek martial artists and as far as we know, this is also the first study within sport psychology that has systematically studied the female athlete's discursive conception of identity, using a discursive approach as articulated by Foucault.

## Methodology

### Researching Greek female judokas

A cultural praxis framework led us to favor particular methodological strategies, such as ethnography, qualitative interviewing and Foucauldian discourse analysis. These approaches align with the underlying assumptions of the cultural praxis framework, in which the (re)examination of identity through the lens of post-structuralist theory was proposed as a central vantage point to open up additional possibilities of understanding sporting experiences (Ryba & Wright, 2005, 2010). Ryba and Wright (2010) further argued that cultural praxis favors qualitative methodologies and "critical forms of ethnography more than any other research tradition" (p. 19). Recently a post-structuralist perspective has been productively utilized in the ethnographic project by Crocket (2014) who studied athletes' experiences of sporting retirement. In a similar manner, the reported study is part of the first author's ethnographic doctorate research in which data were constructed through various methods, such as participant observations and qualitative interviews (see also Krane & Baird, 2005; Sands, 2002; Thorpe, 2010). While the participant observations certainly shaped our understanding of the global judo culture, providing an additional lens for the interpretation of women's experiences, in this paper we only discuss findings drawn from the interviews.

The interviews were conducted by the first author, who has approximately 10 years of training experience in judo. During ethnographic fieldwork that took place in Greek judo clubs between November 2010 and May 2012, interviews were conducted with female athletes older than 17 (16 is the age of consent in Greece), as well as with other key informants, such as female judo coaches and retired elite female athletes. The locations of the interviews varied from quiet coffee shops near training sites to participants' residences to competition arenas. The purpose of the inquiry was explained in detail, and a consent form was signed before each interview.

Similar to Crocket (2014), we used semi-structured interviews to make open-ended inquiries, focusing on participants sporting experiences. The interview guide used contained questions that defined the issues to be explored initially. For example, the participants were asked to describe in detail when and how they started judo and to discuss their sporting career. They were also asked about the challenges they had encountered and how they coped with those difficulties. However, the interviewer and interviewee could diverge from the questions to pursue other important themes in detail. Ten formal interviews were conducted, audio recorded and transcribed. The interviews lasted from 20 to 60 min. All interviews were conducted in Greek, the mother tongue of the principal researcher and the participants. Only the quotes that are presented in this paper were translated in English, by the first and third authors who are native Greek speakers, studying and teaching respectively in English.

### Participants

The interviewees were 10 women with a median age of 29, having a median of 13 years of training experience. At the time of data collection, five were active competitors with training experience of 5–20 years and competitive experience at the national and international levels. Their ages ranged from 17 to 29 years of old. The other five women were retired international judokas between the ages of 29 and 40, with training experience of 12–21 years. At the time of the interviews, four participants were working as coaches. Five participants had competed in the Olympic Games. In general, high-level judokas were invited to participate in this study since our purpose was to study identity within the elite judo context. In this article, we refer to the participants by pseudonyms.

### Reflexivity

In carrying out reflexive cultural sport psychology research, researchers must acknowledge their own experiences and subjectivities, as well as their influence in the research process (McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Ryba, 2009; Ryba & Schinke, 2009; Schinke et al., 2012). Fieldwork and qualitative interviewing entail relationships of power and the researcher plays a central role in the construction of data (Sands, 2002). Thus, a meaningful point of reflection was how Anna's subjectivity, athletic experiences and epistemological situatedness played a role in producing and interpreting interview data.

Anna is a judoka and a Greek woman close to the mean age of the participants. She has spent most of her life in Greece and her experiences in sport echo the literature findings of women fighters who struggle to find balance between muscularity and socially accepted femininity. When thinking of her judo practices in Greece, Anna can recall times that she felt gender harassed (discriminated because of her gender) and sexually harassed (in the form of unwanted sexual attention and comments) (see Chroni & Fasting, 2009). The participants, knowing that they were talking with a female Greek judoka who shared similar experiences, provided Anna with detailed accounts of their gendered experiences in judo.

As an insider to the Greek judo culture, Anna shared the same language and understanding of social practices with the participants, whereas her subjectivity was also constructed through the negotiation of the same cultural discourses. However, as a gender scholar studying, living and training in Finland's more egalitarian context, Anna was able to distance herself from taken-for-granted cultural understandings; and to interrogate the dominant discourses and social practices that exist in her home-culture. The second and third authors are experienced qualitative researchers whose relevant life experiences and research expertise in issues of gender and culture were significant in shaping the results.

#### Analysis

The interview transcripts (that were in Greek) were read and re-read by the first and third authors. The second author regularly discussed the research process with the principal investigator and served as a "critical friend" (Wolcott, 1995), furthering the analysis by encouraging reflection regarding theory, data and emerging themes. First, a thematic analysis was completed which consisted of identifying meaningful fragments and coding them into themes and concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The aim of performing thematic analysis was to identify patterns across the interview data, or across the way that female judokas talk about themselves and their sporting experiences. This procedure resulted into four main concepts that were largely present within all ten interviews. Second, the interview extracts that consisted these main concepts were further analyzed through the lens of Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA). FDA is concerned with the role of language in the construction of social life, the discourses available within a culture, and the psychological and social implications of these discourses for those who live in the culture. While there are many ways to perform FDA, we applied the stepwise approach proposed by Willig (2008), which consists of six stages: (1) discursive constructions, (2) discourses, (3) action orientation, (4) positioning, (5) practice and (6) subjectivity. First we sought for self-related talk (e.g. the various ways that female judokas constructed themselves as "strong" or "weak" or "feminine" etc.). Second, we placed these discursive constructions of identity within wider discourses. Third, we looked at the possibilities for action that the constructed identities offered (e.g. what could possibly be accomplished by constructing these identities). Fourth, we looked at the subject positions offered. Fifth, we looked at the practical implications [e.g. possibilities and limitations for action, or what could (and could not) be said and done, by constructing these particular ways of seeing and being in the world]. Sixth, we looked at the psychological impact of adopting certain subject positions. This process helped us to identify the discourses that female athletes invoked to make themselves intelligible as they discussed their beliefs, values, behaviors, and life choices. Multiple identities were constructed drawing upon the identified discourses, each offering different opportunities for action and ways of positioning the female athlete. In the following two sections, first we present the key overarching concepts and themes initially identified through the thematic analysis; second we discuss the identities and discourses that were identified through FDA, within which the concepts take on certain shape and meaning in the participants' lives.

#### Thematic analysis: overarching concepts

Four concepts emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews: biology, gender, femininity, and judo/sport. These concepts were repeated to a great extent by all the participants when talking about their sporting experiences. Below, we present each concept, along with interview extracts.

#### Biology

Certain sets of knowledge regarding human biology determine what male and female bodies can and cannot do (Foucault, 1978). Taken-for-granted biological norms present women's bodies as frail, fragile and incapable of high-intensity exercise, due to their reproductive nature (Jette & Rail, 2012; McGannon et al., 2012; McGannon & Spence, 2010). These sets of knowledge appear as scientific and are taught as such by medical doctors (Vertinsky, 1994). Thus, we tend to accept them as objective truth or reality, allowing them to become deeply embedded in our cultural discourses and practices (Jette & Rail, 2012).

All 10 female judokas interviewed drew on such sets of knowledge to make sense of their bodily experiences in judo. For instance, the participants made statements about gender differences in judo. When asked "Why do you think there are so few women doing judo?", Martha, a 35-year-old coach, replied that "women by nature cannot [do judo]. They do not like to toil much. Their body also does not help them. They get injured a lot". Martha was an elite competitor who represented Greece at international tournaments, including the Olympic Games. Although she was a woman with a successful judo career, she subscribed to dominant biological beliefs about female bodily incapacity. Similarly, Eva, a young champion in her category, believed that judo (and elite sports in general) is designed for male bodies.

Elite sports, in addition to strong will, require enormous effort and truly endless hours of training in order to succeed. So, when a sport requires capacity, requires strength, power, explosiveness, all these features favor more the male athletes.

In addition, participants shared a number of concerns about issues such as menstruation and pregnancy and how these could be combined with judo. Korina, an international competitor who represented Greece at the Olympic Games, seemed to believe that her female reproductive nature sometimes limited her training.

A man [coach] cannot understand women. When I menstruate, to say the simplest thing, when I menstruate, a man cannot understand why I cannot fight, why I'm in pain. He cannot understand me.

For very long time, medical doctors have been educating women on what they can and cannot do, as a result of their biology and reproduction (Foucault, 1978; Jette & Rail, 2012; Vertinsky, 1994). Women learn "to see their bodies and view their natural functions in particular ways," and consequently, biology is often exploited to support an "ideology of female bodily incapacity" (Vertinsky, 1994, p. 149). McGannon et al. (2012) argue that medical narratives positioning sport as incompatible with women's reproductive nature still exist. Our findings support previous research by Velija et al. (2013), suggesting that while women develop physical strength through their involvement in martial arts, they do not question normative views which position women as weak and men as strong. Similarly, the female athletes in the present study naturalize the male judoka's superiority and reproduce the existing patriarchal order in judo, as they draw upon these taken-for-granted notions that tie women's weakness to their biology and reproduction.

#### Gender

Particular social and cultural practices are bound to a socially constructed meaning concerning gender. For instance, feminist post-structuralist theorists have argued that the role of the

caregiver is prescribed to women, while men have the role of the provider (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1997). The interviews with female judokas reflect the social expectations and gender roles present in the Greek cultural context. In line with McGannon and Schinke's (2013) findings, social expectations for Greek women are tied to domestic duties and motherhood, leaving little space for sport. Moreover, our interview data suggest that Greek women learn at a young age what behaviors are deemed to be socially appropriate for girls and women (e.g. staying in the private sphere of the house and taking care of the family), which they tend to accept and even enjoy performing. These "socially appropriate" behaviors are again grounded in women's biology and reproduction, which places them as being "naturally" suited to care for the family and domestic duties within the home. For instance, Anastasia, the judo coach who competed internationally, consents to the traditional gender roles she learned from her family.

What I have as a figure is this here [my family]. This is what I have accepted. This is what I like. I do not want someone who is lying down and doing nothing, but I cannot stand a man in an apron and doing household chores. Meaning, it looks bad to me. I don't like it. And this has to do with what I was seeing as a child. Let's say, my father never did such things—ever. Neither my brothers. They still do not.

According to Foucault (1978), family serves in the (re)production of patriarchal structures and conventional gender roles. This is profoundly the case in Greece where traditional family structures and gender relations persist and Greek women find it hard to escape from their webs of power (Kyriazis, 1998; Lazaridis, 1994; Varikas, 1993). The institution of the family plays a significant role in maintaining traditional roles and values, because it is within family that girls (and boys) learn to behave according to the social expectations. Both girls and boys grow up to believe that a woman's natural role is to perform childcare and household chores (Lazaridis, 1994; McGannon & Schinke, 2013), while a man's role is to compete in the public sphere, show leadership and protect/support his family. Our findings also suggest that family plays a significant role in the beliefs, practices, and behaviors of the female Greek judokas. Regarding physical activity, Greek girls learn from the past generations which sports are suitable for boys and for girls. Korina believes that family and parental beliefs about physical activity influence female participation in judo.

What kind of parent would tell his/her child to go and do judo? All parents think that the right thing for the girl is to do ballet and for the boy to do soccer. These [stereotypes] are coming from the parents. (Korina)

Female judokas seem to be aware that, by participating in a male sport such as judo, they are challenging the stereotypical gender roles and expectations of the Greek society. Many participants reported experiences of taunting (a form of gender-based harassment, Chroni & Fasting, 2009) and/or discrimination. For example, Korina experienced taunting from her peers at school.

The boys were teasing me because I was doing judo, or they were not talking to me because I was a bit different. I was not playing the usual feminine games like dolls, and I was playing hide and seek. They did not want to hang out with me.

Unfortunately, such experiences were not limited to the school environment. Some participants reported gender-based discrimination exhibited by the judo federation. For example, Melina, a

retired elite athlete, believes that she was excluded from international tournaments and training camps because of her gender.

You have passion and love for what you are doing, and there are some people who are restricting you and block your way because you are a woman. For example, when I asked why I hadn't been promoted to international tournaments (like male athletes had) since I am a national champion, an official from the federation told me that I was too old. And when male athletes of the same age I was were sent abroad, I was told that this is the best age for male athletes. So, according to them, as a woman, I should have already quit at the age of 28, while 28-year-old male athletes are at the peak age.

According to Foucault (1977, 1978), society has its mechanisms to discipline and/or punish those who do not adjust their lives to comply with the accepted norms of society. Challenging the traditional gender structures and dynamics, female judokas have to face discrimination, as well as the belief of the male heads of judo organizations that women are more suited to domestic duties of "caring" within the family and home than training in the dojo. Instead of resisting the dominant gender stereotypes, it appears that female judokas are themselves subjected to the belief that judo (and sports in general) is not a natural place for them. Thus, the gender structures and power dynamics in Greek society are reproduced in the experiences of female judokas.

#### Femininity

Being a feminine woman requires behaving, talking, looking, and acting in accordance to the social standards of femininity. In all times and places, these social standards are shaped by everyday communications, practices and knowledge. An ideal feminine body is articulated as fit, thin and sexy (Markula, 1995) and a feminine woman is attractive to the opposite sex (McGannon & Spence, 2012). In order to comply with the socially constructed ideal of femininity, women engage in various disciplinary practices, such as diets and physical activity (McGannon & Busanich, 2010). Particular exercises (e.g. aerobics and dance) are thought as suitable to obtain a "feminine" body and others (e.g. body-building) are thought to obtain a "masculine" body (Markula, 1995; McGannon & Spence, 2010, 2012). Foucault (1977) wrote about "docile bodies", referring to disciplinary practices aiming to control the human body. The female body with its sexuality and its reproductive nature was always a central target that had to be controlled (Foucault, 1978).

The narratives of the female Greek judokas reveal their views of what is feminine (and what is not) within the Greek social context. For example, Eva, the young female judoka, believes that femininity is expressed in physical characteristics, as well as by how a woman talks and behaves.

Regarding the physical characteristics of a woman, such as breasts, you cannot do much. If a woman does not have breasts, she certainly is not pretty, but you cannot do much about that. But regarding the way she talks, the way she behaves, the way she walks, the way she does her hair, or the way she moves—all these, I think relate to femininity. For instance, a female judoka that I know and comes to my mind, I think she does not look feminine, and I think that men would not like this.

Gaining appreciation, not only for one's athletic achievements but also for one's beauty and femininity, is important to female judokas, especially the young ones. Male views on this issue (what men like and do not like) appear as a significant concern among

female judokas. Melina, the retired elite athlete with a particularly long judo career, believes that being a judoka is at odds with the dominant images of femininity.

Because you have chosen this particular sport, you might acquire specific characteristics. When you are an athlete that fights, you cannot be the ethereal creature that moves like dancing. You might acquire a specific athletic-type posture, and men usually do not like that in a woman. They prefer something more airy.

However, Melina sees judo (and the body that is produced by it) as her choice and has accepted the social costs of this decision.

Feminist scholars have pointed out the tensions that female athletes experience when attempting to combine physicality and femininity (e.g., Choi, 2000; Krane et al., 2004). Research on women's martial arts and combat sports has yielded conflicting findings. Mennesson (2000) studied female boxers and argued that, while these women challenged norms, they also displayed traditional modes of femininity. Other scholars provided evidence that high-level female fighters are comfortable with their bodies and unconcerned with public perceptions of their femininity (Macro et al., 2009). Sisjord and Kristiansen (2009) studied elite wrestlers and concluded that, although junior wrestlers were concerned about their bodies, senior wrestlers had accepted their athletic, muscular bodies and the social costs associated with them.

Similarly, variations in how different athletes relate to the femininity discourse are apparent in our study in the Greek cultural context, where notions of femininity are incompatible with power (Arnot et al., 2000) and women have adopted a male gaze, even of their own bodies and sexuality (Athanasiadis, 2007). Some participants, especially the older ones, view femininity as an internal quality unrelated to what one wears or how muscular one is. Others, especially the younger participants, are concerned with maintaining an external, socially acceptable femininity visible to others (see "Discourses and Identity Negotiations" section).

Does this mean that female judokas' views of femininity and how they relate to the discourse of ideal femininity change over the course of practicing the male-dominated sport of judo? Or that female judokas actively choose how to position themselves in relation to the discourse of ideal femininity according to the context and the situation? Previous research has shown that such changes or choices are not entirely voluntary, as female athletes are constantly pressured by the cultural expectations and face social costs for failing to conform to the ideal femininity (Krane et al., 2004). Thus, the cultural construction of femininity in Greece influences female judokas each time they decide how to relate to the femininity ideal and can alter their experiences and behaviors in each situation.

#### *Judo/sports*

Judo as a sporting (sub)culture has its own ornaments, settings, rituals, etiquettes, ethics, and values. Moreover, each judo club shapes its own unique glocal culture. The sets of knowledge that constitute our understanding of what does it mean to be a judoka draw on popular narratives about elite sport, as well as on unique glocal features that have an impact on the Greek judokas' experiences.

Similarly to contemporary talk about sports, the notions of hard training, of investing time and effort in return for victory and success, are prominent in the self-descriptions of female Greek judokas. Being a high-level judo athlete is associated with competition, travelling for tournaments and training camps, coping

with stress and adversity, as well as with a specific body image. In order to comply with the high-level standards of the competitive judo, female judokas have to undergo disciplinary practices (Foucault, 1977, 1978), including hard training, weight management, and dieting. The time required for training and competing at the elite level often leaves no time for other endeavors, such as studying, working, going out with friends, and romantic relationships. For example, Martha describes the life of a judo athlete on the national team as a life fully devoted to training:

All men and women athletes in the national team, we were living in the Olympic Stadium. There, you had your program. You were waking up to train; then again, you were training, three times a day.

Like Martha, the other female judokas in our study also drew on dominant beliefs regarding elite sports to construct individual narratives of past sporting accomplishments and failures. For example, Melina describes a very long athletic career in judo with competition and victories.

I was a medalist for 19 years. Me and another female athlete, based on a survey on competition participations, we were found to be the ones with the longest careers in Greek judo among all athletes (men and women) of all times.

In addition, themes from the philosophy of judo emerged in all interviews. For instance, Korina employs these themes to describe her eagerness to win.

Judo means the gentle way. It means that I fight because I want to win, not because I have something against my opponent. I fight because I have to win for me, not for anyone else.

Critical scholarship within sport and exercise psychology has elucidated how cultural metanarratives concerning elite sports have implications for the ways of being an athlete (e.g., Cosh, Crabb, et al., 2013; Cosh, LeCouteur, et al., 2013; Kavoura et al., 2014; McGannon et al., 2012). Drawing on taken-for-granted beliefs about judo and elite sport, all participants created self-descriptions in the process of (re)-constructing the athlete's identity (see "Discourses and Identity Negotiations" section). In contrast to self-descriptions constructed within the concepts of gender and biology, the self-descriptions constructed within the judo/sports concept position the female judoka as equal to her male counterpart and as a strong, autonomous agent who has power both on and off the judo mats.

#### **Discourses, subject positions and identity negotiations**

Our discursive analytic procedure revealed that female Greek judokas drew upon certain discourses (i.e. a discourse of female biological inferiority, a patriarchal discourse, a discourse of ideal femininity, an alternative femininity discourse and a performance discourse) when talking about themselves and their sporting experiences. Drawing upon these discursive resources, they constructed multiple identities, each serving a different purpose and positioning the female judoka in different ways. These identity constructions were essentially linked to the subject positions offered within the aforementioned discourses. Below, we present the identities that were constructed and the ways in which each identity functions to construct particular ways of being in the world and to constitute the athletes' experiences in judo.

*Discourse of female biological inferiority: the naturally strong woman*

The dominant biological discourse positions women as biologically inferior to men. “Normal” women, because of their reproductive nature, are fragile, weak, and thus less suitable for judo. Does this mean that women who choose to do the male sport of judo are not “normal”? Melina’s words portray how her friends viewed her involvement in judo:

The reaction was strange. They treat you like a different kind of species. You are neither a man, nor a woman. You are something strange for the rest of the people. Sometimes, when you are younger, it makes you wonder, what is it that they find so strange? What makes them see you as something very different? I remember when women friends of mine were having problems, they were coming to me saying “You need to beat up this guy”. And most men felt competitive against me because of my muscle strength. And because I happen to be one of the extraordinary strong women, because of my genes, men were trying to see if they were stronger than me.

Being subjected to the dominant biological discourse, female Greek judokas felt that they had to justify their position in judo. Constructing the identity of a naturally strong woman or a tomboy, they differentiated themselves from the ordinary, weak women: “I was doing well [in sports] because I have natural strength” said Maria. “I was always a tomboy. I liked to wrestle and in school I was always fighting with both boys and girls. I was not made for ballet and stuff like that” Sotiria said. However, this identity construction does not resist (and actually reproduces) dominant biological beliefs that position men as strong and women as weak. By comparing themselves with the (biologically gifted and strong) male judokas on one hand and the ordinary women on the other, female judokas try to find a location that allows them to do the male sport of judo. Accepting the female biological inferiority, but positioning themselves as different to the “ordinary” women, female judokas occupy the anomalous subject position of “neither a man, nor a woman”.

Findings from the present research stress the influence of dominant medical and scientific discourses that represent women as fragile reproductive machines (Jette & Rail, 2012; McGannon et al., 2012), on women’s experiences and identity negotiation (Foucault, 1978; Vertinsky, 1994). Being subjected to such discourses, female martial artists do not problematize normative views of male superiority (Velija et al., 2013). However, the image of a woman fighter does not fit to the gender binary. Mainstream research has extensively compared the female martial artist to the normative male athlete or the normative woman (Kavoura et al., 2012). Not fitting to any of these categories, the female fighter is often constructed as an exceptional being or an anomaly (Kavoura et al., 2014).

*Patriarchal discourse: the persistent woman*

You have to be stubborn and oppose to this whole thing. If you don’t have this, you won’t make it in this specific sport. Sometimes I blame myself for not insisting as much as I should on some matters. I was young and hot-blooded, and I could not think clearly in order to find the right tactics and strategies to handle the difficulties. (Melina)

In relation to the gender roles and stereotypes that exist in the judo context, as well as in the wider Greek societal context (patriarchal discourse), female Greek judokas constructed the identity

of a persistent woman; a resilient athlete that does not give up on her choice to do judo, even if this choice conflicts with the traditional gender norms. However, this identity construction does not oppose the gender order, but instead uses situation-specific strategies and tactics to cope with inequality. These tactics have to be strategically planned in order not to insult patriarchy and the male heads of judo.

It is also our fault. There are some women in the field that are trying to impose themselves in a wrong way. They are coming into opposition with the wrong people, and they are losing their right to be in this field. Such women are giving an ugly picture for the female judokas. We need to be careful how we behave in the field. (Melina)

On the one hand, the identity construction of a persistent woman positions the female Greek judoka as an active agent with opportunities for action. On the other hand, being socialized within traditional gender norms and values, the female Greek judoka occupies the subject position of a woman who behaves according to social standards and respects the gender order.

Previous research on how gender is framed in the mixed-gender judo training environment indicates that judo athletes have to conform to gender stereotypes and order (Guerandel & Mennesson, 2007). Female martial artists use identity management as a strategy to become accepted in this male-dominated field (Halbert, 1997). Moreover, this strategy of adopting the role of the passive woman who behaves is deeply embedded in the mentality of the Greek woman who often chooses to be hidden behind the male heads surrounding her (Athanasiadis, 2007).

*Discourse of ideal femininity: the successful and feminine athlete*

I think it’s very sexy for a woman to participate actively in a sport and at the same time to be able to maintain her femininity visible to the world. Because, truth to be told, if a woman loses her femininity, she ceases to be a woman, and this looks very ugly, especially to the male population. (Eva)

Within a discourse of ideal femininity, women have to be “feminine”, meaning that they have to comply with specific characteristics (e.g. a thin and sexy body). Drawing on this discourse, women are categorized into hierarchies (subject positions): the “feminine woman” vs. the “non-feminine woman”. The “feminine woman” is more privileged than the one that has failed (or does not want) to comply with the socially constructed standards of femininity. Being subjected to the ideal femininity discourse, young female judokas constructed the identity of a successful and feminine athlete, positioning themselves as superior to other judokas who might have succeeded as athletes but not as women. This identity construction functions in gaining acceptance and appreciation both as a competent athlete and as a sexy woman. Previous research has shown that socially constructed ideals of femininity affect the experiences and subjectivities of women athletes (Krane et al., 2004; McGannon & Busanich, 2010) and that female athletes who manage to comply with the social standards are more appreciated and enjoy more media coverage (Krane et al., 2004).

*Alternative femininity discourse: the internally feminine athlete*

Femininity is something that you have since you are born. Sports have nothing to do with your femininity. Neither what you are during the [competition] fight has nothing to do with your femininity. So, a feminine woman would never get angry, or



pissed, or out of control? Or, a feminine woman would never defend herself, or raise her tone of voice? Same way, a woman that does judo, on the mats she is an athlete. She is not a man. She is an athlete. Outside of the training mats she can be as feminine as she wants. (Korina)

The older female Greek judokas seem to reject the discourse of ideal femininity that represents the ideal female body as thin and sexy. However, at the same time, they position themselves as “feminine women” by essentializing femininity as an internal quality. These findings are consistent with previous research on female wrestlers that found that young female martial artists struggle to combine physicality and femininity, while older, more experienced athletes have accepted their athletic body (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2009). However, even as some athletes reject notions of ideal femininity, the normative view that a woman needs to be feminine and a man masculine is still present in the way they construct their identity. By constructing the identity of the internally feminine athlete, female athletes can still adopt the privileged subject position of the “feminine woman”, although their femininity is not obvious externally.

#### *Performance discourse: the silent and committed warrior*

At times I become a bit competitive, because I want to show that boys cannot always win us in judo. We [girls] are also strong. We can do many things, and we have proved it because we too have gotten medals. They [boys] are not the only ones. (Alexandra)

Drawing on a performance discourse, female Greek judokas constructed the identity of a silent and committed warrior, a serious athlete who is equally competent to her male counterpart. Being a woman in the male dominated sport of judo can be a lonely and challenging path. Commitment and determination are key elements in this path of the silent warrior. This identity construction functions in demanding respect and equal treatment from coaches and the federation, as well as from male teammates and significant others. Women athletes are often less appreciated than male athletes (Krane et al., 2004) and, consequently, often feel the need to work harder and win more medals in order to be accepted and appreciated as athletes. However, this identity construction also entails obedience to the rules and loyalty to the team.

I learned how to be in a team, to follow the rules, to be disciplined. This has an impact on how I behave in society too. When I do something, I will do it right because this is what I learned in training. When I want to do something, I will fight for that, and I will do everything in order to succeed. (Alexandra)

Female judokas position themselves as silent warriors, loyal to the judo etiquette and way of doing. They accept the existing structures without critique and submit themselves to the power of authority. Again, the power dynamics in Greek judo culture mirror those in the Greek patriarchal cultural context that reproduce women's subordination through various mechanisms (Lazaridis, 1994).

#### **Conclusions**

Through the thematic analysis of interview data we identified four concepts—biology, gender, femininity, and judo/sports—which allowed us to trace the discourses that female athletes drew upon to make sense of their experiences. Foucauldian

discourse analysis further revealed that drawing on certain discourses (i.e. a discourse of female biological inferiority, a patriarchal discourse, a discourse of ideal femininity, an alternative femininity discourse and a performance discourse), female judokas construct multiple identities. Various identities, such as the naturally strong woman or the silent and committed warrior, serve specific purposes offering different possibilities for action in the global culture of judo. Our findings indicate that dominant beliefs and discourses are reflected in the identities and subject positions of the female Greek judokas. The gender dynamics and hierarchies of Greek society and culture underlie the participants' identity negotiation who themselves reproduce women's subordination in Greek judo, as they try to become accepted and appreciated in both the male culture of judo and the Greek social context.

In line with findings from previous empirical work within exercise psychology (McGannon & Schinke, 2013; McGannon & Spence, 2010, 2012), this study outlines that language and cultural discourses shape the experiences and identity negotiations of women. Extending these findings to the sport context (and specifically to the masculinized martial arts and combat sports context), we found that fluidity and multi-dimensionality of identity reflect the complexity of the social contexts that surround the female judoka, as well as the conflicting roles and social expectations with which she also has to wrestle. The female Greek judoka manages her identity strategically in order to adapt (and become accepted) in all these different contexts, which unfortunately remain patriarchal. The identity management of the elite judokas in this study is interpreted as an adaptation strategy, which appears to support the female Greek judoka in achieving a successful career in the male-dominated sport of judo.

However, to which degree one can choose an identity? The issue of choice when it comes to subjectivity and identity negotiation has been discussed in the past by post-structuralist scholars (Foucault, 1978, 1983; Jiwani & Rail, 2010; McGannon & Busanich, 2010; McGannon & Spence, 2010). While female Greek judokas have some agency, they are forced into this identity interplay by the gender power dynamics that exist in both Greek culture and the culture of judo and are extremely resistant to change. Drawing on dominant discourses, Greek judokas become agents in the reproduction of gender power dynamics. Subjected to dominant gender beliefs and stereotypes, the participants accept the male way as the only way.

How then could we hope for progressive social change in women's judo? To date, we have limited knowledge on how to enhance female participation in martial arts, as well as how to make the experiences of female martial artists more positive. Future research needs to be directed at developing effective interventions that could support training environments in which women martial artists could reach their athletic potential free from fear, harassment, and discrimination. McGannon and Schinke (2013) have recently argued that in order to intervene to make women's experiences more positive, we first need to make women aware of how daily conversation and practices contribute in their feelings and experiences in relation to sport and exercise. The authors further argued that post-structuralism has the potential to raise awareness in these issues. There is a growing body of literature within sport and exercise psychology that offers considerable support for feminist cultural praxis and post-structuralist theorizing, to be useful frameworks for a more sophisticated integration of research with applied work. While changing coaches' and officials' attitudes toward female martial artists could be one goal for inquiries aiming to instigate social change, the present study, located in a feminist cultural praxis framework suggests that it is equally (or even more) important to change the attitudes and perceptions of the female martial artists themselves. Supporting



female martial artists in re-constructing martial arts as a field that is not male only, as a field to which they possess the ability and right to belong, might be the most significant (and challenging) aim for future research and practice.

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### **III**


## **“SOME WOMEN ARE BORN FIGHTERS”: DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF A FIGHTER’S IDENTITY BY FEMALE FINNISH JUDO ATHLETES**

by

Kavoura, A., Kokkonen, M., Chroni, S., & Ryba, T. V. 2017.

Sex Roles

## “Some Women Are Born Fighters”: Discursive Constructions of a Fighter’s Identity by Female Finnish Judo Athletes

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**Abstract** Martial arts and combat sports have been traditionally associated with masculinity, and a range of contradictory meanings have been attached to women’s engagement and experiences. The present study draws on cultural praxis and feminist poststructuralist frameworks to explore how female martial artists are subjectified to dominant cultural discourses surrounding fighting and competition. Interviews with nine female *judoka* (judo athletes) were gathered in Finland and analyzed using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). The FDA revealed that in female judoka talk, judo was constructed as a sport for all, but also as a male domain and a manly sport with fighting and competition as innate masculine qualities that are not learned. Two sets of wider, competing discourses provided the dominant structure for participants’ constructions of judo: (a) a mass sport discourse versus an elite sport discourse and (b) a gender equality discourse versus a female biological inferiority discourse. Drawing on this discursive context and in seeking to make sense of their experiences, participants constructed a “naturally born fighter” identity. Although this might be an empowering identity for female

judoka, it does not advance the agenda of gender equity in martial arts because it constructs “ordinary” women as biologically incapable of competitive judo. Our findings reveal that even in the relatively egalitarian culture of Finland, gender hierarchies persist in judo and that it is only by disrupting prevalent constructions of fighting and competitiveness as masculine that progress toward gender equity can be made.

**Keywords** Cultural praxis · Cultural sport psychology · Feminist poststructuralist theory · Gender · Martial arts

Feminist scholars argue that our societies continue to be organized in gendered ways and that women struggle more than men do with gender stereotypes prescribing what they can (and should) do, think, and feel (Butler 1990; Holmes 2009; Vertinsky 1994; Walsh 2001; Weedon 1997). A plethora of research has revealed that certain physical and psychological attributes (e.g., reason, intellect, assertiveness, strength, and competitiveness) remain persistently associated with male biology, whereas others (e.g., sensitivity, modesty, being warm, kind, cooperative, and dependent) are associated with female biology (see Francis et al. 2017; Jokinen 2000; Prentice and Carranza 2002). Such associations lead to certain fields and disciplines being constructed as male, thereby positioning women as unequal and marginal (Walsh 2001; Weedon 1997). Examples include farming, which is perceived as a masculine domain on the grounds that women’s bodies are not capable of heavy physical work (Saugeres 2002; Stoneman and Jinnah 2015); physics (and science in general) because women are thought to lack reason and intellect (Brickhouse et al. 2000; Francis et al. 2017); service in the armed forces because women are innately incapable of enduring the physical and mental challenges and hardships of military life (Barrett 1996; Vaara et al. 2016); and video gaming,

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which is constructed as a male activity on the view that women are less skillful gamers than men are (Paaßen et al. 2017). The belief that these gender differences are rooted in human biology normalizes an unjust concentration of power in the so called “male domains”; that is, gender inequalities are made to seem like a natural and unchangeable phenomenon (Holmes 2009; Vertinsky 1994; Weedon 1997).

Sport is yet one more domain that has been historically associated with masculinity (see Messner 1990; Young 1993). Despite positive changes in popular beliefs about women’s physicality and athleticism (Anderson 2008; Channon 2014; Woodward 2014), participation in competitive, physically demanding, and/or “violent” sports, which involve a high risk of injury and require tolerance of pain, is framed as a masculine experience (Matthews 2015; Young et al. 1994). This is also reflected in the rapidly expanding gender literature on martial arts and combat sports (Channon and Matthews 2015; Channon and Phipps 2017; Kavoura et al. 2014; Matthews 2014; Mierzwinski et al. 2014; Spencer 2012). Fighting is framed as a violent activity associated with the male physique and against female biological nature (Kavoura et al. 2015b; Matthews 2015, 2016; McNaughton 2012; Mierzwinski et al. 2014; Owton 2015). In martial arts’ gyms around the world, masculine identities and notions of male biological superiority are celebrated (Matthews 2014; Spencer 2012; Woodward 2008). Such traditional understandings of men’s and women’s biological attributes are not only linked to gender hierarchies and inequalities, but also shape the ways that female martial artists make sense of themselves and their sporting experiences (Kavoura 2016; McNaughton 2012; Owton 2015).

One might expect that as women increasingly train alongside men, and their involvement in martial arts becomes “normal” (Channon 2013), positive changes toward gender equality inevitably follow. However, research shows that this is not always the case. Gender stereotypes and hierarchies are reproduced in multiple ways, sometimes by women athletes themselves, through the identities that they construct and perform to gain acceptance in this male-dominated field (Halbert 1997; Kavoura et al. 2015b; Mennesson 2000). They may, for example, perform gender and femininity in ways that reify, rather than question, hierarchical gender relations, such as overtly sexualizing themselves (Channon and Phipps 2017). To advance an agenda of gender equity in martial arts (as well as in other fields and activities that are stereotypically seen as masculine), we need to reveal and disrupt the mechanisms through which the male preserve is reproduced. Our article is directed toward this aim.

### Theoretical Perspective

Feminist poststructuralist theory (in this instance, drawn from Butler 1990, 1993; Foucault 1970, 1972, 1978; Weedon 1997)

provided a point of departure enabling us to question the taken-for-granted male superiority in martial arts. We see gender stereotypes (and the unequal relations that are shaped by them) as resilient to change, not because they are “natural,” but because they are structural (i.e. they exist in the institutions and social practices of our society) and socially reproduced through language and discourse (Weedon 1997).

Foucault (1972) used the notion of discourse to describe ways of thinking, producing meaning, and constituting knowledge. He argued that it is within these systems of thought and knowledge that we learn to accept certain things as true. Consequently, dominant discourses shape our understandings of ourselves and give meaning to our experiences (Weedon 1997). Foucault (1970, 1972, 1978) made convincing arguments to show how power dynamics and hierarchical relationships are reproduced within discourse, for example by constructing certain practices as natural or good, while marginalizing others. His theory of discourse was appropriated by feminist theorists (e.g., Butler 1990, 1993; Weedon 1997) who explicated how women often become the agents of their own oppression by (consciously or unconsciously) subjecting themselves to dominant binary logic of maleness versus femaleness.

Numerous scholars, inspired by Foucauldian and feminist poststructuralist theory, have drawn on discourse analysis to investigate how gender power dynamics operate within various cultural discursive constructions—for instance, the work by Francis et al. (2017) on the construction of physics as a masculine subject and Willig’s (1997) study on constructions of sexual activity. The ways in which cultural discourses shape people’s identities and experiences have also been investigated (see Paulson and Willig 2008, for a discussion on how older women negotiate their identities and their ageing bodies). Examples of this kind of work in the sport sciences can be found in the study by Roy and Ryba (2012) on Muslim women’s sporting experiences and that by Kavoura et al. (2015b) on the identities of female Greek judoka.

Our paper focuses on discursive constructions of judo (and hence also of fighting and competition) and examines how these shape the identity negotiation of female Finnish judoka. As in our previous work (Kavoura 2016; Kavoura et al. 2012, 2015a, b), we position this study in cultural praxis (Ryba and Wright 2005, 2010), a framework that aligns well with poststructuralist theory and discursive work, while advocating social justice and change by making visible the various marginal identities of athletes (McGannon and Smith 2015; Ronkainen et al. 2016a). The cultural praxis framework challenges theories and research that ignore culture and sees athletes’ identities “as constituted by various discourses of race, ethnicity, gender, generation, sport events, and the national sport system” (Ryba et al. 2013, p. 11). Thus, in the present paper, we see female judoka’s identities as inseparable from the context in which they are performed and its various

cultural discourses and material practices (Butler 1990, 1993; Ryba et al. 2013).

### A Primer on Judo

Judo is a sport of Japanese origin, founded in the late nineteenth century by Jigoro Kano (Miarka et al. 2011). Kano's vision was to develop a holistic model of physical education—one that would train body, mind, and spirit (Kano 1986/2005). He created a system that consists of throws and ground techniques (such as chokes and armlocks) and named it *judo*, which means “the gentle way” (Miarka et al. 2011). In his teachings, which are still influential today, judo was promoted as an inclusive sport that could be practiced by every citizen regardless of age, size or gender (Groenen 2012; Kano 1986/2005; Miarka et al. 2011). However, scholars who have examined the history of women's involvement in judo (Groenen 2012; Miarka et al. 2011) argue that, in practice, judo was never as inclusive as its theory suggests. The authors argue that the development of women's judo was constrained by dominant patriarchal ideologies that framed women as fragile and as biologically inferior to men. Women were allowed to practice judo, but their practices had to remain within certain limits fixed by men (Groenen 2012). Until the late 1960s, women's involvement was encouraged only as a form of self-defense and was restricted to softer forms of training, such as *kata* (practice of form and technique), whereas *randori* (free style practice of fighting) or any efforts to participate in competition were strongly resisted (Groenen 2012; Miarka et al. 2011). It was only in 1992 that women's judo joined the Olympic program, although it was an Olympic sport for men since 1964 (Miarka et al. 2011).

Today, judo is a highly competitive Olympic sport for both men and women. Although judo competitions are sex-segregated in the sense that male and female judoka compete in different categories, training sessions are usually mixed-sex; men and women practice along each other and often fight against each other (Guerandel and Mennesson 2007). Despite the empowering possibilities that mixed-sex training offers (Channon 2014), judo *dojos* (martial arts schools) continue to operate under structures of masculine domination, and what is expected of male and female judoka often reflects gender roles and stereotypes circulated in the broader socio-cultural context (Guerandel and Mennesson 2007). Women remain underrepresented as practitioners and athletes, as well as in coaching and managerial placements (see for example, Sindik et al. 2014). Judo continues to be a sport governed by men, as manifested by the 24-member, male-only Executive Committee of the International Judo Federation (IJF; see <https://www.ijf.org/ijf>).

### The Finnish Context

Finland is a relatively egalitarian country, ranking high in international gender equality reports (Humbert et al. 2015). As the first country in the world to accord women the right to both vote and stand for election to Parliament (Sulkunen 2007), and a country where compliance with gender-equality legislation is supervised by various state mechanisms (see Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2016), Finland is considered a pioneer in gender equality. International reports depict Finland as one of the leading European countries in its proportion of female members of parliament (European Union 2016) and female participation in the labor force (OECD 2016) as well as the second-best country in the world in which to be a girl (Save the Children 2016). Moreover, in the list of the world's most gender-equal countries, Finland occupies second place after Iceland, closing nearly 85% of its overall gender gap (World Economic Forum 2016).

Not all gender gaps have been closed in Finland, and differences remain in the opportunities open to women and men. In practice, many aspects of gender equality have remained under the level suggested by international comparisons (Turpeinen et al. 2012). For instance, a gender pay gap continues to exist (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2011) as does gender segregation in Finnish working life (Statistics Finland 2016). Furthermore, traditional, gendered inequality persists in the division of domestic work and childcare (Statistics Finland 2016). Thus, it is not surprising that—regardless of the perceived improvements in gender equality over the past 10 years (European Union 2015)—the majority of Finns still consider women to be in a worse position than men (Kiiänmaa 2013).

In the Finnish sporting world, analogous contradictions exist. On the one hand, Finland is among the few European countries that started to mainstream the gender perspective (see Wiman 2010) in sport coach and instructor training, and The National Women's Sports Operators' Network in Finland (LiikunNaiset) adopted mentoring as a way of promoting the status of women in various sport-related positions (European Commission 2014; Turpeinen et al. 2012). On the other hand, Finnish women remain underrepresented in receiving financial support from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish Olympic Committee (Turpeinen et al. 2012) as well as in serving in managerial and coaching positions (European Commission 2014; Turpeinen et al. 2012). To our delight, the board of the Finnish Judo Federation currently consists of ten members, among whom five are women (see <https://www.judoliitto.fi/judoliitto/ihtmiset/hallitus/>).

Yet, research shows that female athletes seem to feel less competent than males and, consequently, do not aspire to positions of leadership (Ronkainen et al. 2016b). Regardless of projects and campaigns aiming to promote gender equality and to increase the number of young girls participating in



male-dominated sports (such as the Finnish Football Federation's "Princess Football" project; see Hokka 2014), sports in Finland continue to be heavily gendered at all levels and ages (Suomi et al. 2012). Tough endurance sports and sports relying on heavy equipment or vigorous physical contact, such as ice hockey and football, are perceived as masculine (Laine 2004; Pirinen 2006; Turpeinen et al. 2012), whereas women have had easier access into aesthetic or expressive sports (traditionally seen as feminine), such as gymnastics, figure skating, and dance (Marin 1988; Statistics Finland 2016; Turpeinen et al. 2012).

In such an ambiguous sporting context, surprisingly few empirical studies have investigated the lived experiences of female athletes in Finland. Most gender-related research has been conducted in the fields of sport journalism and media studies, showing, for instance, how the media typically focuses on female athletes' motherhood or attractiveness (Turtiainen 2010). Despite changing discourses (Kaivosaaari 2017), the Finnish sport media describe women in rather contradictory ways—as heroic and successful athletes, but also as heterosexual, girly objects whose achievements, records, performances, and athletic skills do not need to be taken seriously (Pirinen 2006). The few empirical studies that have explored the experiences of female Finnish athletes (all conducted by female researchers) revealed that even in the comparatively egalitarian Finnish context, girls' and women's participation in sport is constrained by gender hierarchies (Herrala 2015, 2016; Kavoura et al. 2015a; Rannikko 2016; Ronkainen et al. 2016b).

Ronkainen et al. (2016b) explored the gendered experiences of Finnish distance runners and found that female athletes were more likely to experience psychological distress and loneliness during the final years of their athletic careers. When making sense of their experiences, female runners drew on dominant cultural narratives that construct elite sport as a project of youth and incompatible with being a grown woman, a mother, and a wife. Kavoura et al. (2015a) studied female Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) athletes in Finland and found that gender hierarchies exist in this context and that female athletes adopt various strategies for advancing their careers, such as taking initiative in promoting women's BJJ; creating local, national, and international networks of female BJJ enthusiasts; and organizing women's only courses and seminars. Moreover, Herrala (2015) investigated female adolescents playing the masculine-typed Finnish national game of ice hockey. By playing ice hockey, female adolescents were creating a new gender culture and dismantling the dichotomous gender order, while at the same time reproducing the old biology-based stereotypes of males as more physical, aggressive, and enduring, and thus able to develop athletically more than females (Herrala 2015).

Furthermore, in her study on the experiences of alternative sports participants, Rannikko (2016) found that female roller

derby players emphasized the aggressive, full-contact nature of their sport; enjoyed tackling and body contact, which previously had been impossible for them; and viewed bruises as a sign of good training. Female skateboarders, on the other hand, felt that they had to be very skilled in the sport to be able to escape the false stigma of being just a skateboarders' girlfriend (Rannikko 2016). Overall, these studies foreground and confirm the need to further investigate the subjective experiences of female athletes in Finland and to shed light on how and why the actual practices relating to gender equality in sport deviate from the statistics published in equality reports. Building on previous sport feminist scholarship, the study presented here aims to (a) explore how judo is discursively constructed in female Finnish judoka talk and (b) explore how female judoka are subjectified and negotiate their identities in relation to the cultural discourses circulating in the Finnish judo community.

## Method

### Overview

In the present article, we draw on interviews conducted during a period of fieldwork in Finland that took place between October 2013 and April 2014. The first author (who is also a judoka) was the field researcher. Most of the fieldwork was conducted at a local judo club to which she had access because she had trained there in the past. In this club, approximately 14 athletes participated in a typical training session, of which three were women. Verbal permission was requested and granted from the head coach, who was informed about the purpose of the study. Because the number of women training in the club was small, the head coach provided assistance in establishing additional contacts and gaining access to judo events outside the club. Thus, additional data were gathered in larger training camps and competitions.

### Interviews and Participants

Having established relationships with the athletes through the field researcher's involvement in training sessions, training camps, and competition tournaments, participants were recruited for individual interviews. The interviewees were nine women with a median age of 30 years at the time of the data collection (range 20 to 49 years) and median training experience of 12 years (range 4 to 20 years). Five of them were competing at the international level (of whom one was a Paralympic athlete), two were competing at the national level, and two were retired elite athletes involved with coaching and administration.

Most of the interviews took place in a training institute during a national team training camp, two interviews took

place in a university office, and one interview was conducted online via Skype (see Sullivan 2012 for the appropriateness of Skype for qualitative data collection). The purpose of the inquiry was explained and a consent form was signed before each interview. Although an interview guide (available as an online supplement) was used to ensure that certain issues were addressed consistently in all interviews, participants were given the opportunity to freely discuss any issues related to their sporting careers. Specifically, participants were asked when, how, and why they started judo and to narrate their sporting careers. They were also asked about positive and negative moments, as well as about major challenges faced in their career and how they coped with these. Moreover, participants were explicitly asked for their opinion on why few women do judo in their clubs (and in general), as well as what kind of strategies could be used to increase the number of female participants. The interviews lasted between 25 and 50 min, and they were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions yielded 129 pages of single-spaced text. All the interviews were conducted in English. To protect confidentiality, all names used in the present paper are pseudonyms.

#### Field Researcher's Positionality

Fieldwork, qualitative interviewing, and knowledge production entail relationships of power, and researchers must acknowledge how their own experiences, subjectivities, and other distinguishing features (e.g. gender, class, race, culture) might have influenced the research process (Krane 1994; Ryba and Wright 2010; Woodward 2008). In addition, researchers who physically participate in the research field should reflect on the personal, practical, and political reasons that led them to engage their own bodies and selves in the data collection (Matthews 2015). Hence, a meaningful point of reflection was how the first author's situation in relation to the field of research (Haraway 1988; Matthews 2015; Woodward 2008) played a role in co-constructing and interpreting the data (Doucet and Mauthner 2008; Kerrick and Henry 2017).

The first author is a Greek woman who has been living, studying, and training in Finland for several years. Her researcher positioning was constituted as an "insider" in terms of gender, age, and training experience in judo. The participants, knowing that they were talking with another female judoka, felt safe to provide accounts of their gendered experiences in judo. However, as Woodward (2008, p. 547) argued "the research process can never be totally 'inside' or completely 'outside', but involves an interrogation of situatedness." As a non-Finn, the first author was also an "outsider" in terms of cultural background. This allowed her to embrace distancing as a researcher and to position participants as the experts (Kerrick and Henry 2017;

Ryba and Wright 2010; Woodward 2008) on what it is like to be a female Finnish judoka.

Besides the above mentioned practical reasons that led the first author to engage in embodied research, as well as the obvious academic justifications to explore an under-researched field, the most important factor that drove the interviewer to embark on this research project was her own personal experiences in judo and BJJ. She has many times felt constrained by the gender hierarchies embedded in martial arts cultures. Her politically-minded research agenda was to reveal and challenge the ways that these hierarchies are discursively reproduced.

#### Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed following Willig's (2008) stepwise approach to Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA; see also, Kavoura et al. 2015b; Paulson and Willig 2008; Roy and Ryba 2012). The first author conducted the analysis under the last author's guidance. The interpretation of the findings was then discussed with the second and third authors whose feminist positioning and research expertise in issues of gender were significant in shaping the results.

First, the lead author identified and coded all direct and non-direct references to judo that reflected shared meanings and taken-for-granted understandings. Second, we placed these discursive constructions of judo within wider sporting and societal discourses circulating in Finland. After that, we explored how female Finnish judoka negotiated their identities by considering (a) what possibilities for action the discursive constructions of judo offered to the athletes, (b) what subject positions were available for the athletes within the identified sporting and societal discourses, and (c) what the practical and psychological implications of adopting or rejecting the available subject positions were.

## Results

#### Discursive Constructions of Judo

For more information about the women quoted, please refer to Table 1. In exploring how judo was constructed in female Finnish judoka talk, the discursive analytic procedure revealed that although judo was constructed as a "sport for all," it was also described as a "male domain" and as a "manly sport" characterized by the innate masculine qualities of fighting and competitiveness (see Table 2). Although there were some variations in the ways that the participants framed judo, all three discursive constructions were present in each of the nine interviews.

**Table 1** Participants' demographic and interview information

Pseudonym	Age	Training experience (in years)	Competition status	Location/means of interview	Interview length (in mins.)
Eliisa	20	10	National team athlete	Training institute	34.45
Elli	23	14	National/Olympic team athlete	Training institute	26.59
Hannaleena	28	4	National level competitor	University office	38.08
Heli	43	8	National level competitor	University office	48.17
Jenni	49	12	Retired elite athlete, involved in coaching and administration	Training institute	40.04
Liina	27	17	National team athlete	Training institute	28.21
Martta	31	20	National/Olympic team athlete	Skype	49.59
Piia	30	19	Retired elite athlete, involved in coaching	Training institute	33.14
Sara	37	7	National/Paralympic team athlete	Training institute	25.35

*Judo as a Sport for All*

Similarly to how Jigoro Kano (1986/2005) promoted judo in his teachings, female Finnish judoka framed judo as a sport suitable and beneficial for all and as an activity in which age, size, gender, or even strength do not matter. For example, Heli, responding to the question, "How did you start judo?," described judo as an activity that can be done by (and with) the whole family:

My eldest son started practicing judo when he was six, and then my youngest son also wanted to join. I was following their practices for several years and then I got interested. I signed up too and a year after me, their father also started doing judo. So, everybody has at least tried and we adults are still kind of hooked with it. (Heli)

Responding to the same question, Jenni talked of judo as empowering and as a sport that made her feel confident and

**Table 2** Description and examples of discursive constructions of judo

Discursive constructions of judo	Description	Example quotes
Judo as a sport for all	Judo was framed as an activity suitable for all (regardless of age, size, or gender) and as a sport in which everybody is treated equally in Finland. The empowering possibilities that judo offers for all practitioners (and especially for women) were emphasized.	[Sara, responding to the question "What was it that you liked in judo?"] "I think it's actually the equality that I liked. They didn't care if I am disabled or not. They didn't care if I am good or bad. Everybody wanted to teach me. [In judo] you can fight in the level you are, and you can become better, and everybody is very friendly."
Judo as a male domain	Judo was described as a field in which women are largely underrepresented. Participants provided rich accounts of the difficulties girls and women face when entering such a male-dominated terrain, and they shared strategies that they use to overcome them.	[Eliisa, responding to the question "Even as a junior, you were competing against women?"] "That's right, because there are not so many girls doing judo in Finland and you really can't choose whom you are training with. In my club, there is only me and one other girl. So, two times per week we have to train in a club in another city. Female athletes from all over the capital area gather there, and sometimes there are almost ten girls in the training, so that's really nice. It would be very difficult if I could only train in my own club."
Judo as a manly sport	Judo was constructed as biologically more suited for males. This construction was linked to the association of fighting and competitiveness with masculinity. "Softer," non-competitive forms of judo, such as practicing judo for self-defense, fun, and health or as a physical (and social) activity were presented as more suitable for "ordinary" women.	[Liina, responding to the question "Why do you think there are more men than women doing judo?"] "I think males have some like genetic way to fight. They need to be the Alpha male, so they are born with that. It's not like that with women. They don't really fight like that."

outgoing: “I used to be shy. I was not socially very flexible and it was very nice for me that I could go and do physical things with people who were nice, smiley, and welcoming. I felt good”. Heli also thinks that she has benefited from judo in multiple social, physical, and mental ways:

I think that judo has given me a lot because it is kind of a whole community that I ended up being involved in. Also, I think that practicing judo has given me self-confidence because I know now that I can manage with different types of people. And I think that, especially after I started competing, this mental kind of self-confidence grew in me. It made me feel strong [laughing] and I don’t mean only in a physical way but also mentally. It made me feel that I am able to face my own fears. (Heli)

Such accounts are in line with findings from previous studies that have advocated women’s participation in martial arts and combat sports as a potential source for individual empowerment (Channon and Phipps 2017; McNaughton 2012; Mierzwinski et al. 2014; Owton 2015).

In very positive terms, the Finnish judo scene was described as a field characterized by equality; however, this “equality” had to be gained by the female athletes. For example, in response to the question “What do you think about the levels of support that male and female athletes get from the judo federation?,” Eliisa stated:

I think it’s quite equal for males and females because we have [name of female athlete] who is the best competitor in Finland. This is nice because we have these old judo guys who are coaching now and they think that men rule the world. It’s so nice to be able to show them that this is not the case. (Eliisa)

Findings from previous research also suggest that women in fields perceived as masculine have to work hard in order to gain the same access to resources that their male counterparts have or to subvert dominant beliefs about their athletic inferiority as well as to gain appreciation for their sporting skills and achievements (see for example, Rannikko 2016).

#### *Judo as a Male Domain*

Despite the “judo for all” and equality-orientated stories, as well as the multiple benefits and empowering possibilities for women we described, the participants recognized that in Finland (and elsewhere) judo is largely dominated by men:

In my club, we have approximately 120 judoka. So, according to the Finnish standards we are an average judo club. But, we don’t have many women. When I

started, I think we had three women. Nowadays we have probably ten. (Sara, responding to the question “Are there many people training in your club?”)

Along with that, participants talked about high drop-out rates for women in judo. For example, in responding to the question, “Have you always been the only woman in your club?,” Elli said: “Sometimes some girls came, and then they quit, and again, and again. Yeah, most of the time I have been the only girl.”

At first, participants would state that being the only woman, or fighting with men, was never a problem for them and it was something that they were used to: “I was so used to it, because usually it is like that in sports. I think at first I hadn’t even realized that most of the people I was training with were men” (Sara). “I was the only one, but I was OK with that” (Hannaleena). However, the stories shared later contradicted this statement. For example, around the time of the interview, Hannaleena was considering changing to another sport: “Nowadays I like BJJ more because I get to train with other women. In judo, there were only guys.”

Overall, although the participants stated that their gender was never an issue, they provided rich accounts of the difficulties that women and girls face when entering a male-dominated dojo, including prejudice and ridicule (see also, Halbert 1997; Kavoura et al. 2015b; Owton 2015).

Sometimes the boys were making fun of me, because I was the only girl. But little by little, I was getting better, and then I was beating them. This made them mad, and their reaction was to make fun of me again. (Elli, in responding to the question “What were the things that really frustrated you in judo?”)

According to Elli’s accounts, she encountered attitudes of this kind not only in youth judoka groups, but even in elite adult groups: “I know some guys in the national team who think that women’s judo is not as good as men’s. They think they are so much better than we are”. Heli also felt that female athletes are often ridiculed, or not taken seriously by their male teammates, and she agreed that the lack of other women in training sessions can at times be frustrating:

If everybody else is this kind of tall men, it’s difficult to practice with them. Then I am frustrated and of course I would like that there would be more women, just for the size... What annoys me is that some men are kind of playing with you. You can see it that they are playing with you in the randori [free style practice of fighting] when they move like saying “oh you cannot do anything.” This annoys me. You just want to do something and throw them, but it doesn’t always happen... When they want to rest, they take me [as a partner for the

randori] because I am small. I don't know if it is because I am a woman or because I am small. For example, yesterday a guy came a bit late to the practice and we had already started doing some groundwork, and when we were changing partners, he kind of told me "I take you first [as a partner] because I don't need to use so much strength." This kind of comments you can hear often. (Heli)

In line with previous literature (Halbert 1997; Kavoura et al. 2015a; Walsh 2001), participants' stories revealed several strategies that female judoka (consciously or unconsciously) employ to survive in this male domain, such as minimizing the impact of gender on their experience and accepting the existing normative practices in their judo communities, connecting with other female fighters, asking for the support of significant (male) others, doing various "chores" for their club, or striving for better results than their male counterparts. For example, Liina, talked about the importance of having other female partners or female role models:

There was one girl with whom I was very close. There were also a few other girls when I started, like four girls maybe, but then they dropped it. So, I think because of this one girl I made it so far. It was important that there was a female partner for me to train with... And when we got our green belts, we had to move to the next group in which actually there were many female judoka that had some success in competitions. So, maybe this is also one reason that I kept going. If all others would be men, then I don't know what would have happened... And actually, the reason that 2 years ago I moved from my home-city to the city I live now was that so many women and girls train here and among them are the best female competitors of Finland. (Liina).

#### *Judo as a Manly Sport*

Although the female judoka's stories reveal that the underrepresentation of women in judo is problematic in many ways, they do not seem to question it. Instead they came to normalize it as a "natural" phenomenon (Foucault 1970; Holmes 2009; Walsh 2001; Weedon 1997) because judo is a manly sport that few women choose (or are able) to do. This construction of judo as a naturally manly sport, which contradicts the "judo for all" stories shared previously, is established through the association of fighting and competitiveness with male biology (Matthews 2014, 2016).

When the participants were explicitly asked "Why do you think there are not so many women doing judo?," they talked about fighting and competitiveness as innate masculine qualities that most women do not possess (see also Kavoura et al.

2015b). These innate qualities were linked to the biology or the personality of the individual and were constructed as something that is not learned but one is born with: "Some people are fighters and some are not" Elli said.

I think most of the men have some inner built thing for any kind of wrestling and competing. They do it when they have been in a bar drinking and even in a friendly situation they compete to each other. We don't do that; and maybe women tend to be more jealous to each other. Men are not like this. They are like friends all together and they are cheering for each other and maybe there is a [sex] difference. I don't mean that all women are jealous to each other, but they have more that feeling than men do, I think. (Hannaleena)

Supporting findings reported by Mennesson (2000), participants in the present study differentiated between competitive and non-competitive (or between "hard" and "soft") forms of judo. Competitive judo was constructed as hard and as a very serious, painful, and demanding activity that is more suitable for men:

Well, I think one reason why not so many women like to do judo is that they need to deal with the pain. Because sometimes it hurts a bit and that's not something that women are used to. I think it's easier for boys. I don't know, but maybe they are able to handle pain better and they don't get hurt so easily compared to women. (Liina)

By associating tolerance to pain with male biology, the female judoka reproduced dominant masculinist beliefs that construct women's bodies as fragile and inferior (Vertinsky 1994; Weedon 1997). Previous studies on the strategies used by women to advance their careers in martial arts (Halbert 1997; Kavoura et al. 2015b; Mennesson 2000) or in other fields perceived as masculine (Vaara et al. 2016; Walsh 2001) have also reported that women themselves often reify normative discourses of male biological superiority. In the present study, soft, non-competitive forms of judo (such as doing judo for fun and health, for self-defense, or as a social activity) were constructed as more appropriate for women:

Where I come from, there are a lot of women training. But it's not competitive judo. It is more like soft judo. There are a lot of women there and they are just doing some kind of techniques, a little ne-waza randori [ground fighting], not that hard, and they are not competing. That has been a success in getting women. I think competing in judo as a woman is harder. You can practice judo. That's OK. But competing is just so much harder. (Liina)

We have discussed about arranging a course for women, but we haven't just made it happen yet. Or we have discussed, what if we advertise that this [class] is for self-defense and not for sport. Would then more women be interested to it? (Heli)

### Dominant Sporting and Societal Discourses in Finland

We examined the discursive constructions of judo as a “sport for all,” a “male domain,” and a “manly sport” through the lens of feminist poststructuralist theory (Butler 1990, 1993; Foucault 1972, 1978; Weedon 1997). Two sets of wider, competing discourses were found to be at work, underpinning the ways in which the female Finnish judoka talked about judo and their experiences: (a) a mass sport discourse versus an elite sport discourse (see also Helle-Valle 2008) and (b) a gender equality discourse versus a female biological inferiority discourse (see also Kavoura et al. 2015b).

#### *Mass Versus Elite Sport*

Finland has a long tradition in promoting sport and physical activity for all (Green and Collins 2008; World Health Organization 2016). However, although policies and legislation favor mass sport, elite sport and athletic performance discourses are circulated in sports clubs and organizations, shaping the ways that Finnish athletes make sense of their experiences. Ronkainen and her colleagues argued that although alternative discourses that place less emphasis on winning exist in the Finnish sporting culture, they are overshadowed by the “winning is all” focus of the elite sport culture (Ronkainen et al. 2013; Ronkainen and Ryba 2012). Critical scholars of sport psychology have argued against the rigid (and gendered) understandings and practices that dominate elite sport culture and can be highly problematic for athletes' well-being, for example when sport performance is not going well or when expectations in sport conflict with societal expectations of one's gender (see for example, Ronkainen et al. 2016a, b; Ryba et al. 2015).

#### *Gender Equality Versus Female Biological Inferiority*

Finland has been successful in reducing gender inequalities in many respects and celebrates its image as one of the most equal countries in the world (Humbert et al. 2015; World Economic Forum 2016). Gender equality is one of the highest societal values in Finland (Laine et al. 2016). However, feminist and critical scholars argue that despite the discourse of gender equality that is proudly promoted in national self-representations, gender hierarchies continue to exist in Finland and are often overshadowed by the belief that gender equality has already been achieved (Jokinen 2000; Ronkainen et al.

2016b). Hyvärinen (2017) argued that bypassing and downplaying gender issues is a problem that occurs when gender equality is talked about as something that has been achieved. The messages Finnish girls and women receive in this post-feminist era are that all complaining is unproductive and that women themselves are responsible for achieving equal treatment (Hyvärinen 2017). Hyvärinen further explained that reflecting these messages, pop culture in Finland is full of “Wonder Women” stories, that is, stories of high-achieving, strong, independent, and self-confident women (see for example Willans' September 30, 2013 article in the *Helsinki Times*). In Willans' (2013) humorous article, titled “Nordic attraction: Why I married a Finnish girl,” the Wonder Woman becomes the subject of male fantasies. Representing the desires of the male subject, this beautiful, magical creature, despite being strong and independent, remains true to the roles and characteristics prescribed for her by the patriarchal discourse (i.e. the beautiful lover and the ideal wife).

Even though Finnish women are more physically active than their male counterparts are (Van Tuyckom et al. 2010; World Health Organization 2016), they continue to be framed as biologically different and physically inferior to men. Beliefs about the frailty of the female body are circulated in the Finnish sports media (Pirinen 2006), in sports clubs, and even by female athletes themselves (Herrala 2015). Milner and Braddock (2016) argue that the discourse of female biological inferiority is irrational, citing research demonstrating that women live longer and are physically more resilient than men are. The authors further argue that this illogical discourse dominates almost all sporting contexts, not because it is natural, but because it is structural. Sport (along with all its rules) is a socially constructed institution invented by men for men (Milner and Braddock 2016; Vertinsky 1994).

### Discussion

In the present study, we explored how judo was constructed in female Finnish judoka talk. In rather contradictory ways judo was framed as a sport for all, but also as a male domain and a manly sport. Fighting and competitiveness were constructed as innate masculine qualities and, consequently, competitive judo was framed as more suitable for the male body. The female body was constructed as fragile and more suitable for “soft” forms of judo. Two sets of wider, competing discourses prevalent in the Finnish society—that is, a mass sport discourse versus an elite sport discourse and a gender equality discourse versus a female biological inferiority discourse—were underpinning the discursive constructions of judo by the female Finnish judoka. Because the discursive field of relevance to the judo community is characterized by competing discourses, female judoka perform multiple identities in



their conformity with and resistance to what is offered to them within these discourses. Although we would never be able to account for all the identities that are constructed and performed by female Finnish judoka, in the present paper we deconstruct (i.e. we seek to reveal the underlying meanings and power dynamics of) the “naturally born fighter” identity—the identity most often constructed by the participants when trying to make sense of and talk about their judo experiences.

### **(De)Constructing the “Naturally Born Fighter” Identity**

In our paper, we see identity as a site of disunity and conflict that is always in process and a product of negotiation of various subject positions and forms of subjectivity offered to us within discourse (Butler 1990; Weedon 1997). In offering particular (and restricted) ways of seeing the world, a discursive field fixes the meaning and hierarchical organization of this world through the subject positions (i.e. locations for people or ways of being an individual) it makes available (Foucault 1970, 1972; Weedon 1997). These subject positions can be taken up or resisted, but this choice does not come without consequences; certain subject positions are privileged, more accessible, or presented as “natural” whereas others are “unnatural” or/and marginalized (Butler 1990, 1993; Foucault 1978; Weedon 1997). If taken up, a subject position opens up particular forms of subjectivity (i.e., conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, as well as ways of feeling and behaving). In our constantly changing world, discourses are continually competing with each other, and the political interests and social implications of any specific discourse would not be realized (or rejected) without the agency of individuals who take up or resist certain subject positions and reproduce or transform social practices. Thus, “individuals are both the site and subjects of discursive struggle for their identity” (Weedon 1997, p. 93).

Within the antagonistic discourses that dominate the Finnish sporting culture, diversified subject positions are offered for women. For example, numerous, alternative (and supposedly non-hierarchical) versions of being a martial artist, an athlete, and/or a fighter are proposed within the mass sport or “judo for all” discourse, guaranteed by the notion of equal opportunity for all in and through sport. However, the elite sport discourse tends to be very specific in determining who matters as an athlete (what are the practices that constitute her/him) and what is “natural” or “unnatural” in sport. For instance, media portrayals of female athletes who are fiercely competitive or have an aggressive style of play place them outside normative definitions of womanhood (Douglas 2002). Furthermore, although the “wonder woman” subject position is offered to Finnish women within the gender equality discourse, this wonder woman remains the object of the male gaze and, when she takes up the forms of subjectivity

offered by the discourse of female biological inferiority, she perceives herself as physically inferior to men. Even if female Finnish judoka do not consciously identify with the whole range of characteristics assigned to women by the female biological inferiority discourse (e.g. women are soft, passive, fragile, intolerant to pain), they adopt this “expert” perspective in explaining female underrepresentation in judo. Drawing on this perspective that is presented as scientific discourse (Foucault 1970, 1972; Vertinsky 1994), female Finnish judoka construct “ordinary” women as biologically unsuitable for the physical and mental stress of competitive judo, as “quitters,” and as emotional beings who tend to complain about everything.

How then did the female judoka make sense of and explain their own sporting success and experiences? In contrast to how they drew on the female biological inferiority discourse when describing “female nature” (Vertinsky 1994), when talking about themselves the participants said they always liked competition and during their judo careers they were able to endure pain and overcome serious injuries. They differentiated themselves from ordinary women by performing the self-image of exceptional beings, born with masculine qualities, such as competitiveness, tolerance to pain, and the ability to fight. The participants constructed themselves as naturally born fighters who never complain and are dedicated to their sporting goals. Although this “naturally born fighter” identity may be empowering for female judoka (allowing them to justify their position in judo, to gain a sense of superiority over other women, and to become accepted in the male domain of martial arts), it also assists in reproducing the belief that fighting and competitiveness are innate male qualities and judo is a manly sport for which few women are capable. Thus, performing this identity, which is understood as compatible with the embodiment of the physical and mental characteristics required of a fighter, becomes a means of reproducing the belief that “ordinary women cannot do this.” Such subjectification to the discursive construction of fighting and competitiveness as naturally male characteristics, while refusing to identify with the category of “ordinary woman,” contributes to the politics of exclusion (Hall 1996) that operate in martial arts.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

As with all research, the subjective nature of our interpretation of the findings must be acknowledged. It is possible that other scholars might have understood and interpreted our data differently. Although we are a group of four women from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds, and we discussed the findings several times in seeking to reach a consensus on their interpretation, we nevertheless recognize that the conclusions we have reached are informed by our individual theoretical positions. Other readings are of course possible, and it was

never our intention to provide a single theoretical interpretation that stands as the only, best, or right one. Instead we have provided a partial and *positioned* interpretation (Haraway 1988) of how judo is discursively constructed and how female Finnish fighters identities are negotiated. Future research could examine the identities of women in other contexts perceived as masculine, and it should seek to understand how sexism is cultivated in these highly gendered fields. Moreover, studies on children and youth could help us to determine how and at what ages beliefs about female biological inferiority start to emerge. Understanding the ways through which the male preserve is reproduced would be the first step in bringing about equality. Once the phenomenon is understood, we can begin to combat it. This means that future research should also target the identification of strategies that might prove more effective in disrupting and challenging discourses of male biological superiority.

### Practice Implications

Our findings have important implications for those interested in promoting gender equality in sporting contexts that are typically seen as male. First, we have shown that the increased presence of women alone is not always enough to challenge persistent discourses that construct certain sports as naturally male domains. Female athletes, whether few or many, often end up reproducing the dominant patriarchal gender hierarchies through the language they use, the practices in which they engage, and the identities they perform. Second, changes in the desired direction of gender equality are never guaranteed through legislation and policies. In fact, nothing can guarantee the success of our feminist wishes for a transformed future. Nevertheless, even without guarantees (Hall 1983), practical work with coaches and athletes (perhaps starting with young athletes and possibly even their parents) should be directed at revising and subverting dominant understandings about the frailty of the female nature.

Our findings also have implications for those who work with women in male-dominated sports, such as coaches and sport psychologists. Those who seek to assist the female athlete in advancing her sporting career should be aware of the gender dynamics that operate in male sporting contexts, and they should turn this awareness into action by empowering women, valuing their experiences, and helping them to challenge limiting beliefs about what their bodies can and cannot do (Gill 1994).

### Conclusion

The present study expands upon previous feminist research on sport by exploring how cultural discourses of sport and gender shape female athletes' identity negotiations. More specifically, our work shows that fighting and competitiveness are

persistently constructed as innate male characteristics. Being subjected to this discourse, female judoka perform identities that contribute to the politics of exclusion (Hall 1996) that operate in martial arts. Our work therefore underlines the need for discursive interventions aiming at permanently revising and subverting discourses that limit women to the social constructed frailty of so-called female nature.

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### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval** This study is part of a larger PhD research project which has been accepted by the University of Jyväskylä Ethical Committee.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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## IV

### **(RE) NEGOTIATING AN ATHLETE'S IDENTITY DURING TRAINING AND RESEARCHING JUDO IN FINLAND**

by

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## (Re) negotiating an athlete's identity during training and researching judo in Finland

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This chapter examines how a female Greek *judoka's* (judo athlete/practitioner) experiences are shaped by the Finnish judo cultural context. Based on field-notes constructed during a larger ethnographic research project, this research builds upon recent scholarship on women's issues in martial arts (e.g. Channon & Jennings, 2013; Channon & Matthews, 2015a; Kavoura, Kokkonen, & Ryba, 2014; Kavoura, Ryba, & Chroni, 2015; Lokman, 2011; McNaughton, 2012). I employ an autoethnographic approach to discuss the changes that occurred in the ways that I make sense of myself and my experiences in judo during my relocation to Finland. I focus on the processes of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation, as well as how these are discursively shaped by the social environment. In order to shed light on the ways that the cultural context shaped my experiences and understandings, I draw upon the *cultural praxis* framework (Ryba & Wright, 2005, 2010) and feminist poststructuralist theorizing.

In the sections that follow, I discuss my theoretical and methodological choices. Then I present my autoethnographic account through critically and theoretically engaging with the data. While this chapter primarily entails an analytic self-reflection of my personal experiences, this knowledge is useful for those who work with athletes. As understanding the ways that athletes' experiences are shaped through their cultural environment is important in facilitating supportive training environments for all, as well as in helping all athletes to have longer, healthier, and more enjoyable sporting careers.



## CULTURAL PRAXIS AND POSTSTRUCTURALIST FRAMEWORK

This study utilizes a cultural praxis framework (Ryba & Wright, 2005). This framework was selected because it calls for sensitivity to the various cultural identities of athletes, and it advocates for social justice and change. When aligned with poststructuralist theory (in this case, drawn from Butler, 1990, 1993; Foucault, 1969, 1975) cultural praxis has the potential to unravel the ways through which certain identities and experiences are normalized and privileged within discourse, while others (e.g. those of women in male sporting cultures) are silenced or marginalized (Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2016; Ryba & Wright, 2010).

In this study, I draw upon Foucault's (1969, 1975) concepts of *discourse* and *discipline*, and Butler's (1990, 1993) *performativity theory* to discuss how my experiences and identity negotiation were shaped by the cultural context. For Foucault (1969), discourses are systems of thought and knowledge. These systems are governed by certain rules and have the power to shape our understandings and realities. People can only make sense of themselves and their experiences by drawing on existing cultural discourses. Moreover, according to Foucault (1975) people's activities, behavior, and bodies are socially regulated through mechanisms of disciplinary power. Disciplinary power manifests itself through hierarchical observation, examination, and normalization (measuring each person according to a norm). Additionally, disciplinary power has a homogenizing effect which encourages people to strive hard to achieve the societal norm.

Butler's work is particularly useful in theorizing identity. For Butler (1990), identities are something that people perform, rather than have. The performative acts of identity are culturally influenced and strongly related to gender norms and expectations. Butler (1993) also discusses the issue of agency when performing gender and identity. While people have some agency in this process, their agency is constraint and regularized through the repetition of cultural norms. This means that we learn how to perform our gender and identities, similarly to the way that actors learn their roles, through the repetition of the performances of others in similar roles.

The above mentioned poststructuralist concepts have been extensively used by sport sociologists and psychologists, as well as by gender and feminist scholars in sport, to map the discourses (of gender, age, class, race, and so

forth) that shape the identities and experiences of athletes (e.g. Kavoura, Ryba, & Chroni, 2015) and to shed light on the disciplinary practices that athletes are subjecting their bodies and themselves in order to fit into the cultural norms and ideals (Johns & Johns, 2000; Markula & Pringle, 2006; Rail & Harvey, 1995). Martial arts scholars have drawn on Foucault and Butler to explore how women's bodies, identities, and experiences are constructed and negotiated in the male domain of martial arts (Jennings, 2015; Kavoura, et al., 2014; Kavoura, Ryba, & Chroni, 2015; Knijnik & Ferretti, 2015; Maclean, 2015) and to inquire into the strategies that female fighters employ to change their positioning (Kavoura, Chroni, Kokkonen, & Ryba, 2015). Aligned with autoethnographic perspectives, poststructuralist theory has been employed to reveal the diversity of women's experiences in martial arts, and to open up space for non-traditional identities of female fighters (McNaughton, 2012).

#### EMPLOYING AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

This study is part of a larger ethnographic PhD research on the experiences of female judo and Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ) athletes (see Kavoura, Chroni, et al., 2015; Kavoura, et al., 2014; Kavoura, Ryba, & Chroni, 2015). Borrowing from the methodological orientations of other female scholar-athletes (see for example, McNaughton, 2012; Owton, 2015; Ronkainen, Harrison, & Ryba, 2013), I have employed an autoethnographic approach to self-reflect on my personal experiences in training and researching judo in Finland. One of the benefits of an autoethnographic approach to inquire into processes of identity negotiation is that it entails "a way of exposing or revealing the interior of an experience or subject position, making it available as a point of understanding for those unfamiliar with a particular identity or subject position" (McNaughton, 2012, p. 2). Moreover, autoethnography aligns well with poststructuralist theory (see for example, McNaughton, 2012) and with the tenets of the cultural praxis framework (Ronkainen et al., 2016; Ryba & Wright, 2010).

Specifically, I have employed the method of *analytic autoethnography* proposed by Anderson (2006), which "refers to ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3)



committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena” (p. 375). Through commitment to theoretical analysis, this method ventures deeper than simply documenting personal experience, or evoking the emotions of the reader. The goal of analytic autoethnography is to use empirical data to gain insights into broader social phenomena (see also, Ronkainen et al., 2013).

In this chapter, my goal is to shed light on the process of a female (and foreigner) athlete’s identity negotiation in the male dominated scene of Finnish judo. For this purpose, I draw on fieldnotes that were written during the period of relocation to Finland, between October 2013 and April 2014. During this time, I maintained a detailed training/research journal, recording my experiences and observations of judo practices, competitions, training camps, and other judo-related social events. This journal allowed me to reflect on my understandings and relationships in the field, and provided a means of documenting how these changed during the course of the research. Most of the fieldwork was conducted in a local judo club. In this club, at the time of data collection, approximately 14 athletes were training in a typical training session, among which three were women. I trained there approximately two times per week (four hours). In total 38 entries (192 pages) were recorded in the researcher’s journal.

While coding and organizing the data, searching for patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I used a theory driven approach, trying to test if the overarching concepts (namely, biology, gender, femininity, and judo/sport)<sup>1</sup> were relevant to the ways that I was making sense of myself and my judo experiences. While these four concepts were visible in my field-notes, only the judo/sport concept dominated my journal writings. A data driven approach was conducted later, which revealed another dominant concept, that being the body. The body (and how it moves) is gendered and is strongly related to dominant discourses regarding human biology. I draw on poststructuralist theory (Butler, 1990, 1993; Foucault, 1969, 1975) to discuss how cultural discourses around the sporting body, and competitive judo/sport shaped my identity negotiation during the time of data collection. I have altered the names of people in the accounts in order to protect their anonymity as much as possible. However, I am aware that judo in Finland is a rather small field and the people, places, and events that I discuss about may still be recognized.

## ENTERING THE FIELD...OR (RE)ADAPTING TO THE FINNISH AND JUDO CULTURE

It's been maybe more than two years since the last time that I have been in this place and I feel very excited. I head to the women's locker rooms and I start unpacking my gi<sup>2</sup>. While I change my clothes, I start wondering...Where are the other women of the club? I see no other female judoka. Anyway, I got ready and headed down the stairs that led to the dojo<sup>3</sup>. In the corridor I spotted someone I know. It was one of the guys that has been training here since 2006, when I first came here. He recognized me too and he stopped to say hi. He gave me a welcome back hug. I am always afraid to initiate a hug in Finland, but when a Finn hugs me, it always feels like something special. It feels like (s)he has allowed me to enter a sacred space that one does not usually like to share with others. I follow him through the door. A couple of young male judoka are sitting on the bench, waiting for the training to start. I don't recognize any of them. The head coach is standing on the mats. When he sees me, he smiles and comes towards me. "Who's that girl?" he says. I realize that I must look very different since the last time he saw me. "Where have you been?" he asks, "in Denmark, in Greece, in many places...but now I am back" I reply. "For how long this time?" he asks, "Maybe for the whole year" I answer. "Good" he said. Elina is also on the mats. She is the only other woman attending the training today. I try to make eye contact with her in order to say hi, but she doesn't look at me. She was never very social. We line up according to the color of our belt in order to do the usual greeting ritual. The coach explains what we are going to do today. Then he asks us to warm up with light ne-waza randori<sup>4</sup>. Elina turns to look at me now. She says nothing, but she nods her head which means that she wants to take the first ne-waza randori with me. I approach her and we knee in front of each other. We greet each other with the usual ritual way and I say "pitka aika"<sup>5</sup>. She nods yes, not saying a word again, and we start fighting.

[...]

At the end of the training session, I approach the coach to tell him about my research; about my double goal of training and collecting data. He asks what my research is about. I shortly explain that it is about women's experiences in judo. He says that he could probably help me to get some interviews from the women of the national team. He adds, "We are not doing anything bad to the women athletes here in Finland". (Research log 8.10.2013).

In most cultures, martial arts remain a male terrain (e.g. Maclean, 2015; Owton, 2015). When a woman enters this male dominated space, she might feel like an "alien intruder" (McNaughton, 2012, p. 8) and she



might have to strategically manage her identity performances in order to adapt, become accepted, and succeed in this masculine culture (Kavoura, Chroni, et al., 2015; Kavoura, et al., 2014; Kavoura, Ryba, & Chroni, 2015). As I (re)enter this field, I am aware of my double marginal position: I am not only a woman, but also a foreigner.

Returning to my old judo club, I needed to (re)adapt to this familiar, but foreign culture. I needed to (re)negotiate my positioning and relationships, and I needed to balance multiple roles and identities. When I first came to Finland in 2006, I was a 22-year-old eager to compete judoka. Even though I never reached an elite level in judo, at that time of my life I identified as a judo athlete, since judo was my main sporting activity. I lived in Finland between 2006 and 2010, and during these years I participated in several regional judo competitions. By the time of data collection (between October 2013 and April 2014), I found myself back in Finland. However, I was not that young competitor anymore, and this time it was my research that drove me to the judo mats. It had been more than three years since the last time I competed in judo. Currently, my main sporting activity is BJJ, in which I compete internationally. The main difference between these two grappling disciplines is that in judo the emphasis is on the throws, whereas in BJJ the emphasis is on the ground work. Thus, I (re)enter the field as both an insider and an outsider: I am an insider, because I am a former (and present) member of the club, and I have been a competitive judoka in the past. However, my status as a foreigner, that occasionally visits the club, makes me also an outsider; and to add on that, I am more of a BJJ athlete and a researcher rather than a judo athlete, as I enter the field.

There is a tournament going on in our city today. I came to watch. One young guy from my club is standing in front of the door. “Why you are not competing?” he asks. “I am too old for that” I reply, “no!” he says. “And I haven’t been training much” I add. I walk a bit around. The athletes are walking around wearing hoodies over or under their gi, in order to keep themselves warm before the fight. You can spot the most talented young competitors immediately. They wear a patch on the back of their gi with their last name along with the initials for Finland. This signifies that they are competing internationally. After the fight, the boys take the upper part of their gi off. They walk around, showing off their naked upper body. One of them has big and developed muscles, they almost look unnatural in his short and young body. Another young guy approaches him; he starts “checking him out” by touching his



abs. The girls immediately fix their hair when they leave the fight. Some girls also take the upper part of their gi off too; they are wearing tight white t-shirts underneath. I go and sit with the audience. Not many people are watching the competition and most of the people there are parents of the competitors. The audience is mainly quiet. Sometimes you can hear a male voice shouting. It is either a father, or a coach. I cannot hear any female voices shouting. (Research log 12.10.2013).

Each time we find ourselves in a new context, we (re)negotiate our identities by drawing on the discursive resources that are culturally available (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1969). By observing others in similar roles, not only do we learn which aspects of ourselves we can perform, but we also construct new understandings of who we are in relation to our cultural context (Butler, 1990; 1993). As I walk around the competition place, I observe the identity performances of these young judo athletes. These performances are always gendered. Physicality is performed and celebrated, but in a gender appropriate way. Observing these performances, and at the same time drawing on dominant discourses around age and performance expectations surrounding the athlete's identity (Ronkainen, et al., 2016), I find it difficult to think of myself as a judo athlete. I cannot identify with these young judo competitors that I described in the above extract. Nowadays, I find it difficult to set realistic and attractive competition goals for myself in the highly competitive Olympic sport of judo. In contrast, BJJ offers a more inclusive competition culture, which provides categories for different ages and levels, even in the most prestigious international tournaments (Kavoura, Chroni, et al., 2015). However, in this chapter, I argue that our identities are fluid (Butler, 1990) and making meaning out of what we do and who we are is a complex, context-dependent, and constantly shifting process.

## THE BODY....AND LEARNING HOW TO MOVE IT THE JUDO WAY

We start to warm up by doing "shadow techniques". The coach names the techniques and we have to execute them without a partner, while we move from the one side of the dojo to the other. We have to do each technique first from the right side and then from the left side. The coach is observing our movements. My left side executions



are really bad. I am having problems in coordinating my body and movement and I feel really bad. I feel that I do not deserve the brown belt that I am wearing. When the coach looks at me I get stressed and I start moving even worse. I am the disgrace of judo. My body doesn't move like a judoka's body.

[...]

I started feeling better. We are doing uchikomi<sup>6</sup> and I am paired up with Heli. My repetitions are fast and explosive. In every repetition, my chest hits Heli's chest and I am almost lifting her body from the ground. The coach is watching. "Do it always like that. Do not change anything" he says. He doesn't give compliments easily. I feel good. (Research log 26.11.2013).

Our bodies (and what we can do with them) are central in making sense of ourselves and our sporting experiences (Lokman, 2011; Maclean, 2015). In sporting cultures, bodies are observed, evaluated, and categorized, according to certain cultural expectations around the "ideal" athletic body (Cosh, Crabb, LeCouteur, & Kettler, 2012; Markula & Pringle, 2006). Athletes and sporting practitioners spend many hours of training in learning how to move their bodies in certain ways. Athletes discipline themselves into sporting practices of hard training, repetition and dedication, it is through these practices that their bodies are standardized, normalized and sportized (Cosh, et al., 2012; Foucault, 1975; Johns & Johns, 2000; Rail & Harvey, 1995). In judo, in order to perform successfully the judoka's identity, you need to move like one. Disciplining your body into learning the judo movements, rhythm, and physicality, is a key feature in such a process of identity negotiation. Moreover, as our bodies (and movements) are gendered, cultural expectations regarding how a woman's body should move and look like, might contradict those of a fighter's body (Jennings, 2015; Knijnik & Ferretti, 2015).

There is a white belt woman on the mats whom I have never seen before. She seems out of place. I ask her if she wants to pair-up with me. She is afraid of my invitation. I smile in order to show her that she has nothing to be afraid of. She pairs up with me but without saying a word. I am wondering if she is just shy, or she can't speak English. We are doing uchikomi and I try to say something in Finnish to her. Finally, she says something! She asks me if she is doing it right. She actually speaks good English so we start communicating normally. The coach demonstrates the technique of the day and we start practicing it. We have approximately the same height and weight. However,

her movement lacks self-confidence. This is of course normal for white belts. I try to keep my movements gentle and smooth, and not to throw her very hard. I don't want to scare her. Trying to copy my movement, she does a couple of slow and clumsy repetitions. The coach sees her and shouts "push her!" in English. Then he continues in Finnish saying something like "this is competitive sport that we are doing here". He wanted to tell her that she needs to be more explosive in her movements. She became a little frustrated and confused. Maybe it was my fault that I did not demonstrate the proper rhythm and intensity of the exercise. (Research log 12.11.2013).

Women often get conflicting messages about their bodies and movements, and this might hinder the process of cultural adaptation to "masculine" sporting cultures, such as martial arts (Lokman, 2011). Female bodies are not supposed to be aggressive and violent (Lokman, 2011; McNaughton, 2012). Constructed as biologically inferior, female bodies are often thought to be incapable of competitive fighting (Kavoura, Ryba, & Chroni, 2015; Knijnik & Ferretti, 2015; McNaughton, 2012) and more suitable for "softer" forms, such as self-defense (Channon & Matthews, 2015b; Lokman, 2011). The following two research log extracts reveal the tensions experienced by female martial artists. While we try to resist such cultural understandings of the female body (extract 1), we are ourselves deeply subjected to them and we often end up reproducing them unconsciously (extract 2).

I am with Heli in the locker rooms. She asks me about my back problems. I start explaining to her that I had to skip the past few trainings. I went to a chiropractic and he instructed me not to engage in fighting or any other form of intense training for at least three days. When I asked him if I could go to the gym to lift some weights, he replied "No, but you can do these exercises that women do" and he demonstrated some stretching. Heli and I laughed at what the chiropractic said, as we headed towards the dojo for judo training. (Research log 25.11.2013).

The coach demonstrates the technique of the day. He explains that the hips need to be flexible. The movement of the hips is very important in that throw, he says. He moves his hips as if he were dancing in order to demonstrate how flexible the hips need to be. It looks a bit funny seeing such a huge guy moving like Shakira. Heli and I look at each other, trying not to laugh. When we start practicing what he just showed us, we find ourselves wondering how he move his hips better than us. (Research log 24.2.2014).



Female bodies are often imagined as lacking muscular strength, but as possessing both rhythm and flexibility (Lokman, 2011). Previous scholarly work on women's embodied experiences in martial arts reveals that women are continuously battling against such cultural understandings (Knijnik & Ferretti, 2015). The biggest battle for a female fighter might be the one against her own understandings of what she thought that her body could do. Despite the persisting masculine and sexist ideologies in most fighting cultures (Knijnik & Ferretti, 2015) martial arts scholars generally agree on the subversive possibilities of martial arts training for women (e.g. Jennings, 2015). For example, when training in a mixed environment, some women will come to realize that they are stronger than some men; and some men might discover that they possess better rhythm and flexibility than some women. These are important lessons in subverting gender stereotypes, which are used to subordinate women in sport, and in building mutual respect and appreciation of each other's skills and efforts, as well as greater gender equality in sport (Maclean, 2015).

#### NEGOTIATING A JUDO ATHLETE'S IDENTITY....OR GETTING YOUR ASS KICKED TO COLLECT RESEARCH DATA

At the end of the training I discussed with the coach about the upcoming training camp of the national team. He said that I could go there with him if I want to collect some interviews, and I should definitely take my gi with me. I try to tell him that I do not want to disturb the training of the national team. It is perhaps better if I don't train. I am not at the same level with these athletes. I just want to come and collect data. "I will only take you with me if you take your gi and you promise to join all the trainings. We train three times per day. I will pick you up Saturday morning", he says. (Research log 3.3.2014).

It is worth mentioning for a moment the potential tension that exists between the different roles and identities of being both an athlete and a researcher. These phenomena have been extensively discussed by other scholars (see for example, Anderson, 2006), and whilst I struggled with these issues during the data collection, those reflections are part of my field notes rather than in this chapter. However, I will focus on the process of negotiating an athlete's identity, as well as how this process was shaped by observing others and comparing myself to the norms and ideals of

being a judo athlete. Moreover, I will discuss how I (re)constructed a judo athlete's identity by subjecting myself to the disciplinary training practices of judo culture, and how this process was facilitated by the supportive practices of significant others. For example, as the research-log extracts (above and below) illustrate, it was the coach that not only assisted in the data collection process, but also opened up a window, which enabled me to see myself again as a judo athlete.

I had to use a map to find my way to the dojo of the sport institute. I opened the door and I saw a big court, like an indoor basketball court with tatami everywhere. A few judoka are already here, waiting for the training to start. Some young guys are sitting on the benches and some girls are lying on the mats. Some other young male judoka are going around with their compression tights and rash guards. They all look extremely fit and I realize that I am among the best Finnish judoka. I start wondering what am I doing here. I feel a bit worried. Will I survive the training? My coach comes in. He asks me if everything is all right with my room. "Everything is perfect" I reply. "This is your lucky day. It's going to be ne-waza training", he says. I smile. "I will probably manage to survive the first training then", I say. He introduces me to the head coach of the national team and tells him about my research. "So you are interested only in women? You are not interested in men?" the head coach asks. My coach and I both laugh. He asks me if I am still training judo nowadays, because this is randori training and it might be intense. I tell him that I am still training sometimes. "You don't have to do everything. Do whatever you feel like" he says. I nod ok, but my coach jumps in saying "She will manage. Anna is doing BJJ". I see a young guy with whom I have been training before. "You came to teach them how to do randori?" he asks. I look at him a bit puzzled, trying to figure out if he is making fun of me, or he is just joking, trying to be friendly. "I came to get my ass kicked in order to get some interviews" I reply. We line up to start the training. There are five or six coaches standing in front of us, among them only one woman. We are more than 50 athletes, although I can only see about ten women. The first athlete in the line says "sensei ni rei"<sup>7</sup> and we do the usual greeting. The head coach explains what we are going to do in today's training. Then my coach introduces me and my study. Everybody turns to look at me and some people nod their heads in a supportive manner. The training starts and we are asked to make pairs. The female athletes quickly pair up but I am left without a partner. I find a young brown belt guy who is also without a partner. We start with some ne-waza exercises to warm-up and I notice quickly that I can do the ground work much better than this young guy. I start feeling more confident. (Research log 8.3.2014).



Within poststructuralist theorizing, athletic identity is conceptualized as a complex cultural construction that is crafted in relation to the social context and the available discursive resources (Kavoura, Ryba, & Chroni, 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2016). When athletes try to perform socially acceptable identities, they draw on dominant understandings of what it means to be an athlete. Ronkainen et al. (2016) argue that the understandings and discursive practices that are associated with elite sports culture are rigid, and they marginalize athletes who fail (or refuse) to meet the norms and expectations, constraining their experiences and endangering their well-being.

During my first training session with the national team I battled with feelings of anxiety. As I compared myself with the elite judoka around me, I felt like an outsider that did not fit in to this culture and I felt like I would not be able to meet the intensity requirements of the elite judo training. I was relying on my BJJ and researcher identities to justify and negotiate my position in this new environment, rather than refer back to my past experiences as a judoka. In order to fit in, I was trying to perform a culturally acceptable identity by observing others in the same role. On the tatami, bodies become the theatrical stages on which identity performances take place; and gender plays a constitutive role in these performances.

The head coach shouts to the athletes to help fix the tatami. There are some gaps between the mats that might be dangerous. The boys are more eager to help than the girls. They lift and push the mats, some of which are quite heavy. Some girls help as well, but most of them are standing around and waiting, including me. I feel that I might not be able to lift and push the mat properly and embarrass myself. (Research log 8.3.2014).

Previous research in martial arts suggests that identity performances might differ when we are in the company of people of the same sex, compared to when we are in mixed-gender spaces (Lokman, 2011). In her ethnographic research, Lokman observed female beginners learning Aikido. She noticed that (similarly to what the above extract describes) female beginners that trained in mixed-groups often felt incapable of carrying the mats into the storage room. However, in the women's-only training group, carrying the mats was part of the routine and no lack of self-confidence was observed.



There is an ongoing discussion about gender segregation in martial arts; some studies focus on the social-significance of mixed-sex practice (e.g. Channon & Jennings, 2013), while other studies discuss the potential benefits of women-only training sessions (e.g. Kavoura, Chroni, et al., 2015). However, martial arts scholars generally agree on the gender-subversive potential of martial arts training and the empowering possibilities for women (e.g. Jennings, 2015). As my research-log extracts illustrate, while there were instances of accepting and reproducing passive feminine subjectivity (as in the extract above), my participation in the training camp of the national team was an empowering experience that involved both physical and psychological transformations, such as embodying self-confidence:

The training had already started when I entered the dojo. They are doing some funny warm up exercises that the national team's head coach introduced in the training camp. My coach says "Anna knows this already" and he asks me to go first, so the others can see how it is done. Janne, the black belt guy, asks me if I was in the training camp of the national team. I say yes and he looks at me with admiration. We are asked to take a partner for uchikomi. There are no other women in today's training. I ask a brown belt guy to become my partner. But soon, the coach asks me to change partner because of the size difference and then he pairs me up with a child. With the feeling that I do not have a suitable partner, I start to lose my excitement. I was very excited at the beginning of the training. The training camp reignited my enthusiasm for judo. A feeling that I thought I had lost forever. But what happened to the Anna who was always trying to include and help everybody during training? Did the competitive Anna kill her?

We practiced some techniques and then the time for randori comes. I become excited again. I am so eager to take randori, and after the tough randori sessions I had during the weekend, I feel that I have nothing to be afraid of in this training. Being more confident than ever, it is the first training in which I do not miss even one round of randori. (Research log 10.3.2014).

My participation in the training camp of the national team triggered a change in the way that I make sense of myself in relation to judo. My expectations changed: training hard and improving my skills became my primary goal. Also, my relationships with others changed, as well as what others expected from me. My role as a researcher became secondary, as I



became more and more consumed with thoughts about my personal performance. How did these changes happen? The environment empowered me to think of myself as an athlete again and the Finnish judo community welcomed me in the national team's training camp. Further, my coach and teammates in the local judo club showed respect and appreciation for my skills, which enabled me to appreciate and believe in my sporting abilities, much more than before. It was the social environment that pushed me to challenge myself with new sporting endeavors and enabled me to imagine myself in new ways.

Heli and Elina are preparing for the national championships and I try to help them by giving them some challenge in the randori and other competition-specific exercises. The coach is closely watching their preparation. Janne is not training today, although he is there observing us. At the end of the training he asks me if I am going to compete to the championships as well. "I can't. I am not a Finn" I reply. "Yes, you can" he says. Heli and Elina join the conversation. They are not sure if non-Finns can compete, but they promise to have a look for me. "You should come if it is allowed" Heli says. (Research log 31.3.2014).

The presence of other female athletes appeared to be a significant factor in this process of identity negotiation. As previous research indicates, great things can be achieved when female fighters collaborate and build support networks: they can make the adaptation process of female newcomers smoother, they can encourage more women to train and compete, and they can even challenge the gender dynamics and their positioning in their club and sport (Kavoura, Chroni, et al., 2015).

Elina, Heli, and I are in the car. The coach is driving us to the competition place. Among the people that train in our dojo, we are the only women, and the only ones that will compete in this year's national championships. The weigh in is in the evening. Elina and I are competing on Saturday and Heli is competing on Sunday. I am eating some nuts in the car and I am feeling incredibly hungry as the last four or five days I have been dieting and running in order to make the weight for my category. I don't know how they persuaded me to participate. I think if Elina and Heli weren't going, I cannot imagine that I would be competing! But the fact that I could train with them and test myself against them, made me want to participate. I also thought that it would be fun travelling with them, and they made everything so easy for me by organizing my registration and everything else. (Research log 11.4.2014).

In dominant understandings about sport, competition is what separates a recreational participant from an athlete. Several challenges and disciplinary practices are associated with competition, such as dedication to training, hard preparation routines, and pre-competition diets (Cosh et al., 2012; Johns & Johns, 2000). Moreover, you need to be willing to put yourself into the situation of performing in front of an audience, which in the case of judo means fighting against an opponent in front of a crowd of people, and getting evaluated and categorized for your skills. Male athletes are often imagined as being more capable of going through these challenges, while women are thought to be non-competitive by nature (e.g. Kavoura, Ryba, & Chroni, 2015). My experiences in Finland, not only changed the way that I make sense of myself, but subverted my own beliefs and understandings related to gender norms in competitive fighting.

Bronze for everybody! I am so tired. I don't know if I can write down all the things that happened, all the things I felt. I had four fights. Lost two and won two. My two friends from BJJ came to watch me. They came all this way just to watch me. After my fights, I sat with them, and we discussed the differences and similarities between judo and BJJ. I think they became a little curious about trying judo sometime. It was so nice that they came. (Research log 13.4.2014).

In addition to the support received within the judo community, getting approval and encouragement for my judo endeavors from the BJJ team, eased the process of finding balance between my two separate athletic roles and identities. As I was (re)negotiating how the different aspects of my athletic self can be combined, I was lucky to see these two communities (judo and BJJ) coming together.

We lined up for the greeting and the coach announced our results from the National Championships. He called our names and gave a small present to each one of us. During the training people came up to congratulate me. I thank them but I feel a little ashamed because I was not actually happy with my performance. I think I could have done better. But, now I feel eager to train and improve. I just need to train very hard. While we warm up, I make plans for participating in future judo competitions and for next year's Finnish National Championships. Will I be here? As I am thinking about all of these different plans, I become aware that my movements feel different now. I move with self-confidence. I move like a judo athlete. (Research log 14.4.2014).



Five women from my BJJ team join the training session. We line up for the ritual greeting and the coach welcomes our new guests. He describes the course of the training. After the warm up, we start practicing some techniques. In the beginning my BJJ friends are paired up with each other and the coach helps them to practice more basic versions of the techniques. I try to help too. Later on, they are instructed to find themselves another partner in order to practice some light form of randori. At the end of the training they look like they have enjoyed it. I stay a bit longer in the dojo. I am stretching and chatting with the people there. It is my last training session today as I am heading back to Greece. The time came to say goodbye again. I hug the coach, thank him for everything, and I promise to come back. (Research log 15.4.2014).

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This autoethnographic study focused on the identity negotiation of a Greek judoka during a period of relocation to Finland. The analysis revealed that the process of negotiating an athlete's identity was eased by: (1) the availability of discursive resources in the new sporting culture and (2) a supportive training environment. When constantly moving between sporting (and other) cultures, athletes have to (re)negotiate their identities, relationships, and positioning, drawing on the discursive resources that are available in their new cultural context. In my case, cultural understandings around the athletic (and the judo) body were central in the ways that I was making sense of myself. The body has to move in certain ways, and has to participate in certain practices, in order to be an athlete's or a judoka's body. Moreover, the body (and what it does) has to comply with the expectations of gender and age. In the egalitarian culture of Finland, cultural beliefs about gender and age, as well as expectations around an athlete's body and performance, are more flexible than those of my home-culture of Greece (see Kavoura, Ryba, & Chroni, 2015). Thus, I was able to (re)negotiate a judo athlete's identity, an identity category that I thought that could not include me anymore. The support I received from others, such as from the coach and other female fighters with whom I could identify myself, facilitated this process.

Although this study is based on my personal experiences and should not be generalized, I believe that certain important observations and practical implications can be derived from this knowledge. People that

work with athletes (such as coaches and sport psychologists) need to be aware of the psychological difficulties and identity conflicts that athletes might struggle with when moving between sporting (and other) cultures. They should seek to assist them in building healthier and longer athletic careers by employing cultural sensitivity and by helping them to reconstruct the rigid and limiting beliefs about gender, age, and the body that dominate elite sporting culture (Ronkainen et al., 2016). This becomes increasingly important in today's globalized culture, in which athletes (elite or recreational) often migrate to other countries for sport or non-sporting related reasons (Ronkainen et al., 2013). Also, this is especially important for getting and keeping women in "masculine" sport cultures, such as martial arts and combat sports, as the cultural messages that women receive in such cultures are often incompatible and this might result in identity conflicts and possibly the end of their sporting careers.

## NOTES

- 1 These concepts were relevant to the identity negotiation process of the female Greek judokas that I interviewed for a previous study (see Kavoura, Ryba, & Chroni, 2015).
- 2 "Gi" is a term of Japanese origin that refers to the martial arts uniform. In judo the uniform is called "judogi"
- 3 "Dojo" is a training place for martial arts, usually covered with mats that are called "tatami".
- 4 "Ne-waza" is the term used for groundwork. Groundwork in judo is carried out when both athletes are on the ground, for example after a throw attempt, and it consists of holds, strangleholds, and armlocks. "Randori" refers to sparring.
- 5 Translates as "long time no see".
- 6 "Uchikomi" is the term for repetition training and in the context of judo it refers to the repeated practice of a throwing motion.
- 7 Loosely translated as "bow to teacher".